

Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative Year Three



Annex A5 Urban Transport for Disabled People

Working Group Report

July 2006



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Urban Transport for Disabled People Working Group Report

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by



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CONTENTS

0.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	i
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 Project Background	1
	1.2 Methodology of the working group.....	2
	1.3 Definition of the working group theme.....	4
	1.4 Site Visits	5
	1.6 Contents and Purpose of this report	5
2.	WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS	6
	2.1 Working group participants.....	6
	2.2 Description of cities represented.....	7
	2.3 Background data from the common indicators	9
3.	DEFINITION OF THEMATIC INDICATORS.....	11
	3.1 Year three research question	11
	3.2 Methodology for indicator definition	12
	3.3 Data Collection and Analysis	12
	3.4 Definition of interesting practice.....	13
	3.5 Data limitations and barriers to data collection.....	14
4.	ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC INDICATORS.....	15
	4.1 Making public transport accessible versus funding dedicated services	15
	4.2 Training	16
	4.3 Agenda for accessibility	18
	4.4 Social Outcomes	19
5.	GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES DRAWN FROM THE WORKING GROUP	20
	5.1: Case Study – Dedicated Transport Services for Disabled People	20
	5.2: Case Study – Towards an accessible public transport network	23
6.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	24
	6.1 Introduction.....	25
	6.2 Conclusions.....	25
	6.3 Recommendations	27

0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been produced in a slightly different format to the rest of the Urban Transport Benchmarking reports in order to conform with standards set by the UK Department for Transport for visually impaired readers.

The Urban Transport for Disabled People working group was founded at the beginning of the third and final year of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Project. The group consisted of three active participants: the cities of Aalborg (Denmark), Hasselt (Belgium) and Paris (i.e. the Ile-de-France region). 'Follower cities' have included Bucharest (Romania), Fife (Scotland), the London Borough of Camden and Uppsala (Sweden).

Because of the constrained timescale, of less than one year, in which the working group had to operate (during which the group had to establish its objectives and priorities) only two site visits were completed. Nevertheless, these visits, to Hasselt and Paris, provided an interesting contrast in approaches towards the provision of accessible public transport in urban areas, illustrating two different policy options in relation to the group's chosen focus. This related to the trade-off between investing in improving the accessibility of mainstream public transport rolling stock and infrastructure, and funding a specialised, but dedicated, service that meets the needs of all disabled people, including wheelchair users.

All group members found it very useful to be able to compare the experiences and policy priorities of transport practitioners in other European cities, and to discuss different means of providing accessible urban public transport services, in a constructive, non-competitive environment. In this context, the working group contributed to achieving the wider project's objectives of sharing knowledge among urban transport providers, and disseminating best practice throughout Europe.

Key findings and conclusions from the working group's activities include:

Hasselt: Accessible Public Transport System

- There was much evidence from the site visit to Hasselt of a commitment to making mainstream public transport services accessible for all members of society.
- Translating such a commitment into the delivery of an accessible travel environment is facilitated by the fact that one operator, De Lijn, has control over all public transport in the city, and in the surrounding area. There is also the advantage of there being a strong commitment to the achievement of full accessibility at the level of the Limburg regional government.

- As a result, the site visit hosts were able to demonstrate a great deal of progress that had been made in providing public transport services in Hasselt that were both accessible and free to the end-user.

Ile de France: Specialised Demand Responsive System

- Whilst Hasselt is a city of some 70,000 population, the problem faced by STIF (The regional authority for the Ile de France) in delivering 'fully accessible' public transport services in both the city of Paris and the wider Ile-de-France region – by 2015 - is somewhat greater.
- Although plans are in place to invest in the mainstream public transport network, in order to make as much of the network accessible to as many people as possible – and there has recently been investment in new tram rolling stock and infrastructure – it is widely accepted that achieving 'full' accessibility throughout the Ile-de-France region by 2015 is probably unrealistic.
- Accessibility for all of the region's citizens has instead been secured, in the meantime, through investment in a showcase, accessible demand responsive transport service – the PAM system (Paris Accompagnement Mobilité). This service consists of a large fleet of lift-equipped minibuses, staffed by full-time, uniformed drivers and escorts, and controlled by a state-of-the-art booking and control facility.

Comparison between the Accessible Urban Transport Policy Approaches

- In spite of the difference in emphasis apparent in the two policy approaches, it should be pointed out that, in both locations, work continues to be done to address both individual needs and the accessibility of mainstream services.
- Whilst it has already been noted that much investment is, and continues to be, channelled into mainstream public transport provision in Ile-de-France, De Lijn also provides a demand responsive back-up service for its urban bus system.
- Since there are limitations to the extent to which 'full' accessibility can be achieved in Hasselt, because bus stop infrastructure does not yet provide level access at each stop, and because the city's buses provide a designated spaces for just one wheelchair user, there is a lift-equipped, wheelchair accessible minibus service that can be called upon by passengers as a back-up.
- Because these minibuses are provided by De Lijn, which is constrained to being a provider of a public service, however, the limitation of this demand responsive back-up service is that it can only operate between bus stops, so cannot operate in a door-to-door capacity.

Staff Training

- One aspect of De Lijn's package of provisions that was demonstrated during the site visit to Hasselt was the commitment to the training and education of all members of the company's staff in disability awareness.
- It is recognised that a key element of providing an accessible public transport system is the ability of members of staff to have an understanding of the needs of people with different types of disability, including people with sensory impairments, and people with learning disabilities.
- Drivers in particular, represent the immediate point of contact that the travelling public has with the public transport provider, need to receive such training, so that they have knowledge of how best to assist disabled passengers.
- With strong support from the regional government, the city of Hasselt provided a good illustration of the importance of commitment both "at the top", and also "on the ground", at the public interface.

Recommendations

- The European Commission should recognise the valuable contribution that the Urban Transport Benchmarking project has made to the sharing of knowledge, and to the dissemination of good practice, throughout the European Union, and should consider funding similar activities in the future.
- The European Commission, and the European transport community as a whole, should seek to develop a standardised definition, or series of definitions, to identify the accessibility of urban transport systems. The varying definitions present in the 4 cities involved in this working group made it very difficult to formally compare the 'true' degree of urban transport accessibility being provided for disabled people.
- There should also be recognition that the Urban Transport for Disabled People working group has shown the particular benefits of sharing knowledge of different approaches towards, and priorities for, the provision of accessible public transport services. This is particularly relevant in the context of a growing level of interest, both in Europe and in America, in the benchmarking of the accessibility of environments for disabled people.
- Any future initiatives to benchmark accessibility in different cities should consider ways of measuring the social benefits of providing transport services that are accessible for everyone.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

The Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative has sought to apply the concept of benchmarking to the urban transport systems present in cities across the European Union (EU), including the New Member States. This is in keeping with the EU's policy approach which places considerable importance upon the role attractive, efficient local and regional transport systems can play in the economic development and social cohesion of the EU. In the field of urban transport the exchange and promotion of best practices is one of the main policy tools that the European Commission possesses. The Urban Transport Benchmarking initiative has therefore compared the differences between the participating cities' transport systems in order to identify and promote effective practices in urban transport.

The benchmarking concept has great potential when applied to urban transport systems. A range of previous initiatives has provided this project with the opportunity to sharpen the focus of the benchmarking process and, by learning from previous experiences, provide more comparable results. The development of more practical data indicators has aided the learning process for the organisations involved in the project and this has greatly helped to improve the robustness of the data collected for the project.

The Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative has adhered to the European Commission's subsidiarity principle by including as many urban transport stakeholders as possible. The process of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative has been a fluid one, responding to the issues which were raised by participants in the project, rather than following a rigid, predetermined process. In this way the subsidiarity principle has been fulfilled, because the recommendations of interesting practices are coming from a network of urban transport operators, user groups, local authorities and municipalities, rather than a single centralised institution. It is therefore hoped that the project's findings will provide a useful resource for other urban transport stakeholders and help them to implement innovative solutions to commonly experienced urban transport problems.

This report covers the third and final year of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative, which began in September 2005. During the first two years of the initiative a range of themes was pursued, for which data were collected by the participating cities. These themes were organised as working groups and are listed below:

- Behavioural and Social Issues in Public Transport
- City Logistics
- Cycling
- Demand Management
- Public Transport Organisation and Policy

During the second year of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative the working group structure was retained, although due to insufficient interest in the City Logistics theme this group did not continue. In order to replace this topic this group, focusing upon Urban Transport for Disabled People, was established in year three of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative.

This report presents the findings of the Urban Transport for Disabled People working group, the methodology used by the working group, the data collected and analysed and the recommendations emanating from the analysis. Year three of the benchmarking initiative represents the final year of the project and, as a result, the emphasis of the reporting has shifted from previous years in order to take into account the need to disseminate the findings to a wider audience. As an additional activity the reports from each of the working groups are supported by a good practice case study handbook, which provides detailed descriptions of the good practices and urban transport solutions that cities involved in the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative have implemented.

1.2 Methodology of the working group

The Urban Transport for Disabled People working group was created at the beginning of year three of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative, following interest expressed in this topic throughout the course of the project. However, due to the short life span of the group and the nature of the topic, it has proceeded with relatively few participants. The impression gained throughout the research was that relatively few offices that deal with transport and inclusion have abundant resources to allow an ideal level of involvement within the benchmarking project. The cities that did participate in the project were;

Participant Cities

- Aalborg
- Hasselt
- Ile de France (STIF)

Follower Cities

- Bucharest

- Uppsala
- Fife
- London Borough of Camden

Figure 1.1 - Cities and regions represented in the working group



The working group has broadly followed the timetable of other working groups within the benchmarking project (see Table 1.1); however, there have been a few differences. As a result of the relatively late start of the working group and the time pressures on the personnel involved, it has only been possible to arrange two of the proposed three site visits. In line with the objectives of the other working groups involved in the benchmarking project, one of the core aims has been to try to identify good practice through the site visits, and to use both quantitative data and qualitative analysis in order that the participants in the group may learn from each other's approach to urban transport for disabled people.

Table 1.1: Working group time-plan

Event	Date	Progress
Launch Conference: Brussels	September 22 nd 2005	Proposal of group theme and preliminary discussion of potential research topics.
Site Visit 1: Hasselt	January 12 th and 13 th 2006	Agree research question and discussion of potential data indicators for collection.
Site Visit 2: Ile de France	May 4 th and 5 th 2006	Clarification of any problematic indicators and agreement of deadline for collection.
Final Conference: Budapest	June 16 th 2006	Presentation of interim results and case studies of good practice

The working group expert Dr Philip Barham (TTR) was responsible for guiding the group's research focus and overseeing the discussions which took place during the site visits. Dr Barham has also been responsible for proposing a number of topics on which data could be collected by the group, and has used his expertise to assist with the interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative outputs. The group has also been supported by Sam Roberts (TTR), who, as the rapporteur for the group, has been responsible for the organisation of site visits, the preparation of reports and co-ordination of the working group as a whole.

1.3 Definition of the working group theme

With no previous year's work to draw upon, the group had a blank canvas upon which to focus its research for the year. The working group's theme, set as Urban Transport for Disabled People, covers quite a large topic area and within this a number of different aspects were discussed at the Brussels launch of year three of the initiative.

Following these discussions it was decided to focus on ***the balance between making mainstream public transport accessible and providing specialised services for disabled people***. The group also decided to

examine some of the more social advantages of the different approaches to providing transport for disabled people.

1.4 Site Visits

The working group attended a total of two site visits over the course of year three of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative. The locations for the visits were:

- 1) Hasselt (January 2006)
- 2) Ile de France (May 2006)

The site visits and working group meetings provided an opportunity for participants to gain an insight into the practices and policies, in terms of the provision of transport for disabled people and for transport as a whole, of similar entities to themselves. Details of the site visits are available in Annex 5.1 which accompanies this report.

1.6 Contents and Purpose of this report

This report is Annex A5 of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative Year Three final report, and describes the approach taken by the Urban Transport for Disabled People working group. The findings from the data collected by the group are presented and analysed along with the recommendations of the working group.

The remainder of the report consists of a description of the cities and regions that participated in the working group, accompanied by relevant background statistics derived from the common indicators (section 2). Section 3 of the report outlines the methodology for defining the thematic indicators and the process of data collection. Section 4 of the report contains the analysis of the thematic indicators and section 5 outlines case studies of good practice that have been observed. The final section of the report, section 6, presents the conclusions made by the group and the recommendations for further developing the theme of the working group.

2. WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS

This section contains information on the participants involved in the Urban Transport for Disabled People working group during this third and final year of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative. Section 2.1 details the participants involved, section 2.2 contains descriptions of each participant in the working group and section 2.3 provides data which provide some context for the size and situation of each of the cities represented.

2.1 Working group participants

Three cities were active participants in the group's activities; Table 2.1 lists the participants, the organisations they work for and the cities and regions they represented in the project.

Table 2.1: Summary of working group participants

Area	Organisation	Status	Country	Participant
Aalborg	Municipality of Aalborg	Local Authority	Denmark	Morten Jensen
Hasselt	VVM De Lijn	Public transport	Belgium	Paul Arents
Ile de France	STIF (Syndicat des transports d'Ile-de-France)	Public transport authority	France	Sabine Avril
Bucharest	CODATU Romania	Network Organisation	Romania	Viorica Beldean
Fife	Fife Council	Local Authority	Scotland	Trevor Meadows
Camden	London Borough of Camden Council	Local Authority	England	Nirmala Sharma
Uppsala	Uppsala City Executive Board	Local Authority	Sweden	Peter Eklund

The cities and regions taking part differed quite widely in terms of the size of urban area and in terms of population. The geographical, and other, differences between the participants should be borne in mind when making

any comparison of approach towards the issue of providing accessible urban public transport.

The remainder of section two of this report summarises the geographical and urban transport situations in each of the participating cities/regions and utilises some background statistics from the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative common indicators to provide context for further comparisons.

2.2 Description of cities represented

Ile de France / Paris

Paris is the capital city of France and has an urban population of 9.6 million inhabitants, 2.1 million of which live in 'Paris Ville'; the central area of the city which covers an area of 100 km². The urbanised area of Paris covers 2,459 km² and is surrounded by the Ile de France region, which is also represented in the working group.

RATP is the largest public transport operator in Paris and is responsible for the majority of the capital's public transport services, while the independent bus operators in the city are represented by the umbrella organisation OPTILE. In Paris the provision of public transport is predominantly through sub-surface modes such as the RER urban heavy rail network and the extensive metro system. In the last 5 years the city of Paris has also invested in the first new tram capacity to be constructed in the city for more than 60 years. Additional tram construction is planned in Paris with the aim of creating a network of suburban tram routes which start where the Paris metro lines currently finish.

Aalborg

Aalborg is the fourth largest city in Denmark, situated on the banks of the Liim Fjord, and is the main city within North Jutland. Aalborg has an urban population of approximately 121,000.

There are frequent daily flights from Copenhagen, and Aalborg airport is only 7 kilometres from the city centre. An intercity train connects Copenhagen and Aalborg every hour, and there are ferry connections to Hirtshals, Hanstholm and Frederikshavn, an hour's drive to Aalborg. Most buses in Aalborg are low-floor buses and have a reserved area for wheelchair users. Service buses stop more frequently than other buses, and this means that older or disabled people in particular do not have to walk far to catch a service bus.

Hasselt

Hasselt is a city and municipality in Belgium, capital of the province of Belgian Limburg. Hasselt has a total population of approximately 70,000 (in 2006). The total area is 102.24 km², which gives a population density of 685 inhabitants per km². Hasselt is located on the Demer river and is also connected to the Albert Canal.

Hasselt lies at the junction of important traffic arteries from all directions. The most important traffic artery is the motorway E313 Antwerp-Liège. Hasselt itself is enclosed by 2 ring roads. The outer ring road serves to keep traffic out of the city centre. The inner ring road, the so-called 'Green Boulevard', serves to keep traffic out of the commercial centre, which is an almost entirely pedestrian area. Public transport by bus has been free of charge since 1997.

Bucharest

Bucharest is the capital city of Romania and is situated in the south of the country, on the Romanian plain. The city has a population of 1.93 million inhabitants and covers a total surface area of 238 km², representing 0.8% of the entire surface area of Romania.

Public transport within the urban area of Bucharest is provided by four major mass transit modes: metro, tram, trolleybus and bus. While there are several above ground railway stations within the urban area, in practice they are not used to any significant extent for urban transport. Urban public transport in Romania is generally the responsibility of local government. Thus, in Bucharest the responsibility for the surface modes of public transport rests with the Municipality, which has in turn devolved the responsibility to the principal public transport operator, RATB. The only exception to this is the Bucharest metro system, which is the responsibility of a Ministry of Transport enterprise called 'Metrorex'.

A key feature of the tram network is the semi-circular route along the inner ring line. Two sets of routes run radially from southern outer-urban locations to the inner ring, and then split towards the East and the West, traversing the inner ring from the South of the city to the station in the north. There is no direct service provided between the North and West sectors of the ring. Some of the routes leave the inner ring in the North to provide radial links to outer urban areas.

The RATB bus network covers almost the entire surface of the city and largely follows a radial pattern from the city centre to the peripheral areas in

the Bucharest Municipality, while some routes reach the 'Communas' beyond the city boundary.

Trolley buses are intended to provide a feeder network of short distance services. However, they also provide a high-density service across the city centre along an East - West axis and to the station. Trolley buses have recently been used to replace tram services at the extremes of certain tram routes within the inner ring road because vibrations were damaging old buildings.

2.3 Background data from the common indicators

This section of the report uses data from the common indicators, and background data from the group's thematic indicators, in order to provide some basic information and comparisons for each of the cities and regions represented in the working group. Table 2.2 shows the key statistics for the main cities and regions in the working group.

Table 2.2: Background statistics for cities/regions in the working group

Statistics (2004)	Aalborg	Hasselt	Ile de France region	Bucharest
Area of city km²	60	102	2,370	1,521
Population of city	121,100	70,000	9,644,507	1,930,000
Population density (people per km²)	2,018	686	4,069	1269
Area of region km²	597	2,414	12,070	3,104
Population of region	163,228	805,786	11,362,000	2,230,123

As can be seen from Table 2.2, the cities / regions within the working group differ significantly in terms of size of area and population. The Ile de France statistics reflect that the city of Paris is contained within the region, and as such distort the statistics.

The following key observations can be made;

- The Ile de France region is the largest participant in the working group both spatially and in terms of population size. The Ile de France

represents the regional measure, which encompasses a total of 12,000 square kilometres and contains a population of 11.36 million inhabitants.

- When compared with the Ile de France region, Aalborg and Hasselt appear to be similar in terms of both size and population. However, Aalborg is the larger city, with a population figure almost 75% greater than that in Hasselt.
- Population density is highest within the Ile de France region, as would be expected through the presence of Paris. Hasselt has the lowest population density, almost 3 times lower than for Aalborg, and almost 6 times lower than for the Ile de France region.

3. DEFINITION OF THEMATIC INDICATORS

Section 3 of this report contains a summary of the processes whereby the working group developed and refined a list of thematic indicators within the specific research theme of our group.

Section 3.1 describes the research question selected by the working group and section 3.2 explains the methodology that was used to define and select data indicators. Section 3.3 focuses upon the data collection and analysis of the data and section 3.4 outlines the definition of interesting practice which has been used by the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative. Finally, section 3.5 highlights the main barriers to data collection, and data limitations encountered by the working group.

3.1 Year three research question

The working group's research theme was originally conceived through discussion at the launch workshop of the third year of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative, and was further developed during the first working group site visit to Hasselt, which took place in January 2006.

The working group participants elected to focus their activities on ***exploring the balance between making mainstream public transport accessible and providing specialised transport services for disabled people***. The group also decided to examine some of the social advantages of the different approaches to providing transport for disabled people.

Due to the nature of the research question, which involved studying the relative approaches and attitudes towards the provision of transport for disabled people, the group agreed that the data collection process would differ slightly to the other groups within the project. Whereas for the majority of working groups the collection of a large number of comparable numerical indicators would provide meaningful statistics, the group did not feel that this approach would adequately represent the circumstances surrounding the provision of transport for disabled people. With this in mind a combined strategy of collecting some quantitative data along with a greater amount of qualitative information was developed.

The group felt that this would best address the chosen topic area, where the non-availability of certain indicators may be a reflection of policy.

The indicators that were selected were divided into four sections;

Making public transport accessible, versus funding dedicated services

– this section aimed to find out the extent to which the cities funded specialist transport services for disabled people, and the relative proportions of funding spent in comparison to that allocated for making mainstream public transport more accessible.

Training – exploring the kinds of disability awareness training that are undertaken, and to whom it is provided; whether disabled people are involved in the training process; and what information is specifically provided for disabled people.

Agenda for accessibility – whether there is a legal framework for setting a date, or dates, by which public transport must be made accessible; how disability is defined by the organisation; what proportion of the transport network is currently wheelchair accessible.

Social Benefits – whether attempts to measure the wider social benefits of providing transport for disabled people in either form have been made, and, if so, what results have been obtained.

3.2 Methodology for indicator definition

Drawing on the knowledge gained by the other rapporteurs within the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative project during previous years, and their experience with defining and collecting indicators, it was agreed that the Urban Transport for Disabled People group should concentrate on collecting what were considered to be a comparatively small number of indicators. The reasoning behind this was that past experience had shown that a low response rate had been seen where participants had been requested to collect an exhaustive data set. To further increase the response rate, additional discussion of the indicators took place at the second site visit in Paris, where the availability of the indicators amongst respondents was verified.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

All participants within the project were emailed a copy of the data collection form, which had been created using Microsoft Excel and was based on a standardised template to ensure the comparability and easy management of collected information. Respondents were requested to return data for analysis and discussion by the 26th of May 2006.

Data Analysis

The thematic indicators were analysed using a combination of Microsoft Excel and qualitative data analysis methods.

3.4 Definition of interesting practice

The aims of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative data analysis were clearly defined at the outset of year one, and these remained unchanged:

- To look for best practices and try to establish reasons for variations between data.
- To encourage all participants to take part in this process in order to ensure a set of findings supported by reasoned analysis, rather than a collection of statistics.

As a result, the approach of seeking 'Best Practice' was retained for the second year of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative. What constitutes a 'Best Practice' had been heavily debated over the course of previous benchmarking projects. The major problem is that there is no all-encompassing definition which clearly defines 'Best Practice'. In the case of this initiative, the term 'Best Practice' was applied more loosely to include 'interesting practices that are displayed in the operation of the participant's urban transport systems'.

From the outset, it should be emphasised that it has not been the goal of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative to create a competitive atmosphere among the participants, and at the launch conference it was clearly stated that this is not a competition with 'winners' and 'losers'. Promoting interesting practices, through the use of benchmarking, so that a wide audience of cities, operators and local authorities may benefit from them, is a concept with huge potential. Creating a set of 'winners' and 'losers' does not help to achieve this, because it may dishearten those perceived to have 'bad practices', whereas these groups of participants probably have the most to gain from this type of project.

The aim of the project has therefore been to try to offer the participants the chance to benefit from the project by presenting a set of findings that will interest all of the participants. Disseminating a range of interesting practices is also likely to be of wider interest to those not participating in the project.

3.5 Data limitations and barriers to data collection

The topic of transport for disabled people, and in particular the approach taken by the working group, does not lend itself easily to being studied in a quantitative manner. As a result of this, there were significant limitations on both the data that could be collected, and the availability of the data that it was decided would be worthwhile to attempt to collect. This limitation was exacerbated by the relatively low number of participants, which meant that a relatively small set of data was collected.

4. ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC INDICATORS

Thematic indicator data were submitted by four of the cities within the working group: all of the active participants (Aalborg, Hasselt, and Ile de France) and Bucharest; a follower city. As a result of the irregular nature of the data that had been received, comparative analysis has only been made where an appropriate number of equivalent data have been received from working group participants. The full data set is included as Annex A5.1.

4.1 Making public transport accessible, versus funding dedicated services

Directly addressing the issue of the main research question (exploring the balance between making mainstream public transport accessible and providing specialised transport services for disabled people), the first set of indicators focused on exploring these elements.

Of the four responses received from the working group participants, only one has a structured specialist service providing wheelchair accessible transport for disabled people; this is the Ile de France. However, this service, known as PAM (“Paris Accompagnement Mobilité”), is only a relatively recent development within the Ile de France, having been launched in 2002. Prior to this, specialist wheelchair accessible transport services were operated by an informal network of not-for-profit operators, outside of the realm of ‘public transport’.

This dedicated transport service is funded partly through Syndicat des Transports d'Ile-de-France (STIF) itself, along with a combination of the regional authorities and the user paying a fare directly. This is in contrast to the not-for-profit services which were operated on a volunteer basis with funding coming through government grants and charitable donations. Generally, for not-for-profit operated services, the user incurs no charge; however, the service operated is of a significantly lower standard than that currently in operation in Paris.

Although the Ile de France operates a dedicated transport service for disabled people, it is also making efforts to increase the accessibility of its public transport system, along with the other participants in the working group. Financial information regarding the amount invested in making public transport accessible has not been supplied by the working group participants, so it is difficult to contrast the amounts spent with that spent on providing a dedicated service, as in the Ile de France.

There has also been very little work done to examine what the benefits of these two types of investment have been, beyond some participants counting the number of disabled passengers carried. However, in an attempt to justify the amount spent on making public transport more accessible, STIF has found that 18,000 wheelchair travellers were recorded travelling on the accessible bus lines during 2005; the alternative for these passengers would have been to use the dedicated door-to-door service which costs STIF approximately €30 per trip, much higher than the cost to STIF for each public transport trip.

STIF also provides statistics supporting their investment in specialist transport services as evidence of the impacts of the investment; in 2005 900,000 trips were made using the door to door service. However, STIF also states that the information service (Infomobi) reports that 60% of all the origin to destination trip enquiries made can be satisfied through the accessible portions of the public transport network, further reducing the investment needed in specialist transport provision.

One of the other indicators that was designed to explore the accessibility of public transport for disabled people was the number of complaints received by disabled people. Where these data have been available, the number of complaints has been very low (less than 10 per year across all participants), with one participant even finding that the more they have done to improve accessibility, the more complaints they have received (Hasselt). In this situation it is felt that the increased number of complaints is as a result of the increased number of 'new' disabled passengers travelling on the accessible part of the network who are finding that some other parts of the network are not accessible. An increased number of complaints might also be a reflection of increased expectations among disabled people as a result of improvements to the accessibility of services.

Of the working group participants, only STIF attempted to explain the impact of these investments on the lives of disabled people. The answer given states that improved access to public transport is beneficial to all users, and that features such as low floor buses result in time savings for operators during the boarding and alighting processes.

Overall, there is a clear difference between the Ile de France and the other working group participants when it comes to the provision of specialist wheelchair accessible transport services. The Ile de France provides a first rate door to door service for disabled people at relatively little cost to the user. By contrast other working group participants focus on providing a public transport service that, whilst having many accessible features, may not be

fully accessible, or have a door-to-door service of a lesser standard operated by not-for-profit organisations.

4.2 Training

In order to examine how the different partner organisations address the needs of disabled travellers, this section explores the provisions that are in place for providing information and assistance.

In two of the participant cities, a form of disability awareness training is given to some members of staff within the transport industry, although the extent and content of this training varies. The Ile de France and Hasselt both provide a form of training for public transport drivers, who might come into contact with wheelchair travellers and other disabled travellers. Additionally, the Ile de France also provides training for metro station staff and other personnel who may come into contact with disabled people.

In both training programmes, disabled people have been consulted in order to develop the training material; for example, in the development of training videos explaining the needs of disabled passengers. Disabled people's involvement is most notable in Hasselt, where the public transport operator collaborates closely with Toegankelijkheidsbureau, the Office for Accessibility in Belgium; a not-for-profit organisation promoting design and accessibility for all. The Office for Accessibility invites disabled people to come and explain to an audience of drivers about their experiences of travelling by public transport. A significant sum of money (€200,000) has been spent on specific training for drivers in Hasselt, making them aware of the issues faced by disabled people when travelling.

Three of the working group participants provide specific information for disabled people travelling by public transport, although the standard and content of this does vary. A significant amount of information is available within both the Ile de France and Hasselt, with slightly less extensive information available in Aalborg. The Ile de France and Hasselt both offer a telephone information line which provides information about the accessibility of a particular journey which the caller wants to make. The Ile de France information line and website; Infomobi, includes daily updated information on the operating status of the lifts around the public transport network. A similar service is operated in Hasselt where the 'Belbuscentrale' provides information to the prospective customer over whether their journey can be made by normal public transport, which depends on the bus stops being accessible. The amount of information available in Aalborg is slightly less, with transport information for disabled people being provided through printed leaflets and

folders and a website. There is no specific information available for disabled people travelling in Bucharest.

4.3 Agenda for accessibility

Interestingly, of the four participants, Hasselt, which has significant provision for disabled people, does not have a definition of disability within VVM De Lijn (the public transport authority and operator) and the Flanders region. Instead, a decision has been made to define an 'accessible journey'. In other cities and regions, different definitions of disability are provided by a range of structures; from public transport operators' own definitions, to definitions in law.

With different definitions of disability, there is also a difference in the proportion of the transport network that is classified as being wheelchair accessible, between working group participants. A number of the participants have found it difficult to classify what proportion of their network is accessible, due to these different definitions. For example, in the Ile de France, an accessible bus line is only accessible if all stops on the line are accessible. Even where over 90% of stops are accessible, these are not advertised as such, to avoid misleading the public. Currently, 50% of bus lines are accessible, with a similar proportion of stations accessible on the heavy rail lines in the Ile de France.

As a result of the varying levels of data provided by participants, it is impossible to make any meaningful comparison of different levels of accessible public transport between cities.

Another meaningful statistic that was chosen as a thematic indicator was whether or not a legal deadline has been set by which time full accessibility of the public transport network must be completed. Interestingly, three of the four participants have a deadline for accessibility in different forms. The Ile de France has the most stringent deadline, which is for the full accessibility of the public transport network by 2015; this compares with Hasselt, where only the rolling stock should be fully accessible by 2022, with no deadlines set for making the bus and tram stops accessible. Bucharest also has a deadline for making the transport network accessible; a significant task given that Bucharest currently states that less than 1% of the city's public transport network is wheelchair accessible.

4.4 Social Outcomes

At the second working group meeting, in Paris, a discussion on the inclusion of indicators representing social outcomes took place, and it was decided that, whilst it was expected that the number of responses would be quite low, these indicators should be included. The importance of having these indicators was to show that the end goal was not just to have an accessible public transport system, but to show what benefits there are for disabled people, and what benefits there are for society.

As expected, no actual data were provided by working group participants on social outcomes; indeed, it is very difficult to measure such outcomes, although two participants did provide descriptive answers. The answers provided point to the social benefits of increased mobility of disabled people through easier access to goods and services. It is also presumed that the effort to provide disabled people with the means of accessing sites of interest, such as museums, will in turn result in such places making an effort to become accessible themselves.

5. GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES DRAWN FROM THE WORKING GROUP

This section of the report identifies the examples of good practice which have been shown or demonstrated through the working group and site visits, with a focus on the issue of the balance between making mainstream public transport accessible, and providing specialist services.

5.1: Case Study – Dedicated Transport Services for Disabled People



In 2002, STIF initiated a door to door transport service for disabled people called Paris Accompagnement Mobilité (PAM), to replace a previous, relatively uncoordinated system operated by a series of not-for-profit organisations. STIF, as the public transport authority, decided to upgrade the provision of these transport services, and a new organisational and financial framework was adopted, based on 2 main elements;

- The setting up of a regional information centre ('Infomobi') on the accessibility of public transport systems for disabled people, and
- The definition of a regional framework for the provision of door-to-door services, and of reservations centres, in each département...

Infomobi

Infomobi is a service which collects all the necessary real time information about the accessibility of the public transport network, to allow travellers to make an informed decision about the accessibility of their journey, given current conditions. The service gathers information from RATP (bus, tramway, metro, heavy rail), SNCF (suburban rail) and OPTILE (a federation of 80 private bus operators), and includes information such as whether the station lifts are fully operational.

Regional Framework

STIF, through the regional framework, is responsible for setting targets in terms of number of trips, defining the category of entitled people, and co-ordinating the provision of the service. STIF has also defined the terms of

reference for the reservation centres that will be set up in each of the 8 départements, so that they are compatible with each other and are able to provide integrated information and services for passengers wishing to travel within the whole region.

Figure 5.1 - A demonstration of a PAM vehicle



Paris Accompagnement Mobilité (PAM)

The aim of the PAM service is to carry 1.5 million passengers per year once the service has been fully developed. This figure would include 450,000 trips within the city of Paris alone, compared with a previous figure of 80,000.

Each département is responsible for selecting the operator of the service through a tendering procedure. Within Paris, Keolis has been selected as the operator for a period of 6 years, and operates a fleet of approximately one hundred vehicles, and employs over one hundred staff members. The PAM service is only open to those people who are classified by the medical commission as being at least '80% disabled', and users of the service have to pay a modest fee of €6 for peak journeys and €3 for off-peak journeys. It has been estimated that the real cost to STIF of providing the service is approximately €30.

Trips can be booked by telephone, post, fax, or via the internet. The transport service is available 7 days per week from 06.00 – 24.00, with the

call centre open daily from 07.00 to 20.00 to advise passengers and assist them in planning and booking trips.

Six months after its inauguration, PAM already had 1,500 registered users, with 60% of the users making commuter trips to work. The statistics indicate that 20% of passengers make up to 80% of the trips.

Figure 5.2 - Loading a passenger



Figure 5.3 - Demonstrating the features of the vehicle



5.2: Case Study – Towards an accessible public transport network

A different approach to the issue of providing transport for disabled passengers is provided by Hasselt, in Belgium.

Background

On the 1st of July 1997, De Lijn, the Flemish public transport operator, which operates public transport in Hasselt, introduced a policy of 'free' public transport on the nine bus lines that comprise the city network. The system works with the City Council paying for each ticket that a passenger would normally buy to travel on a bus within the city network. The city of Hasselt estimates that it costs each family within Hasselt approximately €23 in taxes for the provision of free public transport.

Inclusive Transport Policy

Partly as a result of bad publicity in the local press, due to a small group of campaigners protesting about the inaccessibility of the bus network, De Lijn developed an inclusive policy. The premise for the policy was to provide equal treatment for all customers, wherever possible. The priority for the project was to focus on those parts of the infrastructure that would give the highest returns on investment, and to identify 'quick wins'.

Accessible Public Transport

Alongside an inclusive transport policy, it is necessary to have accessible transport. As a result, accessibility criteria are integrated into the technical specifications for new vehicles, including the availability of manually operated ramps to allow access for wheelchair users. To increase the accessibility of buses, driver training and guidelines have also been introduced, to assist disabled passengers and others with reduced mobility, in boarding and alighting buses. At present, 45% of the total De Lijn fleet consists of low floor accessible vehicles; however, the entire bus fleet will be fully accessible by 2010.

Accessible Infrastructure

Despite moving towards an accessible public transport fleet, within Hasselt there remains a problem for wheelchair using passengers with the high proportion of bus stops that are considered to be inaccessible. For a journey to be accessible, it requires both the origin and destination bus stops to be accessible, as well as the public transport vehicles. Where this is not the

case, De Lijn, as the public transport operator, provides a specialist accessible minibus which can offer an accessible bus stop to bus stop service, as an alternative to the less accessible service vehicle. Because of the inaccessibility of some stops, there is a condition to the 'accessible' bus network, in that wheelchair users are requested to telephone and reserve their journey at least 2 hours in advance, a time comparable with the demand responsive public transport service which operates within rural areas. Telephoning in advance allows the call centre staff to check the required journey against the database of inaccessible stops, to see whether the specialist vehicle is required, and also to confirm whether the wheelchair space is available on the required service.

There are approximately 350 bus stops within the Hasselt urban area, and to modify all of these, at a cost of approximately €10,000 per stop, would take considerable time and expense. Plans for 2006 include the adaptation of the 20 bus stops which are the most frequently requested, but which De Lijn is currently unable to provide for with its normal service bus. Currently, approximately 60% of the journeys requested by wheelchair users have to be made by the specialist minibus service; however, it is expected that this figure would fall to 5% -10% by the time adaptation of the 20 most used bus stops is complete.

Figure 2.4 - Accessible Bus, Hasselt



6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This section summarises the key conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from the Urban Transport for Disabled People working group during the third year of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative.

6.2 Conclusions

Whilst members of the Urban Transport for Disabled People working group managed to collect little hard data that could be used in formal analysis, the activities of the group did enable interesting comparisons to be made between different approaches to the provision of accessible transport in urban areas. The composition of the working group was particularly suitable for examining differing approaches to the trade-off between investing in making mainstream public transport services accessible for all users, and funding specialised transport for disabled people.

The two site visits that were made by working group members during the course of the third year of the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative illustrated contrasting policies in relation to this important trade-off between delivery of a public service, and attention to the transport needs of individuals; these visits were hosted by VVM De Lijn, the operator of public transport services in Hasselt, Belgium, and the Syndicat des Transports d'Ile-de-France (STIF), the authority responsible for public transport in Paris and the wider region.

There was much evidence in Hasselt of a commitment to making mainstream public transport services accessible for all members of society. Translating such a commitment into the delivery of an accessible travel environment is facilitated by the fact that one operator, De Lijn, has control over all public transport in the city, and in the surrounding area. There is also the advantage of there being a strong commitment to the achievement of full accessibility at the level of the Limburg regional government. As a result, the site visit hosts were able to demonstrate a great deal of progress that had been made in providing public transport services in Hasselt that were both accessible and free to the end-user.

Whilst Hasselt is a city of some 70,000 population, the problem faced by STIF in delivering 'fully accessible' public transport services in both the city of Paris and the wider Ile de France region – by 2015 - is somewhat greater. This is because Paris alone has an urban population of some 9.6 million inhabitants,

and, in common with London, has a very extensive public transport network of trams, trains and buses, with much of its transport infrastructure dating back to the early part of the 20th century. Although plans are in place to invest in the mainstream public transport network, in order to make as much of the network accessible to as many people as possible – and there has recently been investment in new tram rolling stock and infrastructure – it is widely accepted that achieving ‘full’ accessibility throughout the Ile-de-France region by 2015 is probably unrealistic. Accessibility for all of the region’s citizens has instead been secured, in the meantime, through investment in a showcase, accessible demand responsive transport service – the PAM system (Paris Accompagnement Mobilité). This service consists of a large fleet of lift-equipped minibuses, staffed by full-time, uniformed drivers and escorts, and controlled by a state-of-the-art booking and control facility.

In spite of the difference in emphasis apparent in the two policy approaches, it should be pointed out that, in both locations, work continues to be done to address both individual needs and the accessibility of mainstream services. Whilst it has already been noted that much investment is, and continues to be, channelled into mainstream public transport provision in Ile-de-France, De Lijn also provides a demand responsive back-up service for its urban bus system. Since there are limitations to the extent to which ‘full’ accessibility can be achieved in Hasselt, because bus stop infrastructure does not yet provide level access at each stop, and because the city’s buses provide a designated spaces for just one wheelchair user, there is a lift-equipped, wheelchair accessible minibus service that can be called upon by passengers as a back-up. Because these minibuses are provided by De Lijn, which is constrained to being a provider of a public service, however, the limitation of this demand responsive back-up service is that it can only operate between bus stops, so cannot operate in a door-to-door capacity.

One aspect of De Lijn’s package of provisions that was demonstrated during the site visit to Hasselt was the commitment to the training and education of all members of the company’s staff in disability awareness. It is recognised that a key element of providing an accessible public transport system is the ability of members of staff to have an understanding of the needs of people with different types of disability, including people with sensory impairments, and people with learning disabilities. It is particularly important that drivers, who are the immediate point of contact that the travelling public has with the public transport provider, receive such training, so that they have knowledge of how best to assist disabled passengers. With strong support from the regional government, the city of Hasselt provided a good illustration of the importance of commitment both ‘at the top’, and also ‘on the ground’, at the public interface.

The working group was generally very successful in providing the opportunity for practitioners from different cities in Europe, and who work in different environments, with different policy approaches to the provision of accessible public transport services, to share experiences and to learn from one another. In this context, the group's activities made a significant contribution to the dissemination of knowledge and ideas. All working group members appreciated the chance to see for themselves what was happening in similar, or contrasting, contexts to their own, and to discuss different priorities and approaches in an informal, non-competitive environment.

6.3 Recommendations

- The European Commission should recognise the valuable contribution that the Urban Transport Benchmarking Initiative has made to the sharing of knowledge, and to the dissemination of good practice, throughout the European Union, and should consider funding similar activities in the future.
- There should also be recognition that the Urban Transport for Disabled People working group has shown the particular benefits of sharing knowledge of different approaches towards, and priorities for, the provision of accessible public transport services. This is particularly relevant in the context of a growing level of interest, both in Europe and in America, in the benchmarking of the accessibility of environments for disabled people.
- Any future initiatives to benchmark accessibility in different cities should consider ways of measuring the social benefits of providing transport services that are accessible for everyone.