

WSCF DISCUSSION PAPER: BUS STOP INFRASTRUCTURE

What is bus stop infrastructure?

Bus stop infrastructure is the interface between alighting and boarding a bus service. It can include; waiting areas, accessible pathways, street furniture, shelter, lighting, signage, boarding points and bus service timetable information. As the interface between passenger and a bus service, the bus stop plays a vital role in:

- Ensuring bus services are physically accessible for people with a disability, mobility impairment, vision impairment, older persons and people with prams.
- Increasing the accessibility of jobs, education, health facilities and retail facilities
- Allowing bus users to feel safe, secure and comfortable whilst waiting for the bus to arrive
- Providing bus users access to time table information and/or directions to services when boarding or alighting a service.

As a general principle, WSCF believes that bus stop infrastructure must not be considered as separate to the bus system, but rather considered as an essential component along the bus trip continuum.

Currently in NSW it is the responsibility of Local Government to provide bus stop infrastructure. Local Government's main role in relation to public transport is to provide the infrastructure for access to services provided by State Government agencies or the private sector, for example bus stops, interchanges and parking facilities at train stations.

Whilst bus stops along strategic corridors are often furnished with appropriate infrastructure, bus stops at a local level are largely under furnished, often only being identifiable by a pole with a sticker or sign on it. Whilst WSCF acknowledges that signage and facilities at bus stops for the Strategic Corridors have recently been made highly visible and attractive, the current provision of infrastructure at 'local' bus stops is inadequate and inequitable.

In an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald, Mr John Scott, previously the Chief Executive of State Transit states:

The unpalatable fact is that, for decades, successive State Governments, while ultimately responsible for public transport, have ignored bus infrastructure. How poorly we treat bus passengers in terms of infrastructure for waiting and boarding. There is no uniformity in boarding facilities- indeed, in many, if not most situations, there are no decent boarding facilities at all¹.

Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport

The Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (the Transport Standards) were developed in the late 1990s, and became effective from 23 October 2002².

In recognition of the importance of public transport to people with disability, Parliament passed the Transport Standards under the Disabilities Discrimination Act, which outlines measures that transport operators and providers should take to make public transport more accessible.

According to the Attorney-General's Department:

The Standards establish minimum accessibility requirements to be met by providers and operators of public transport conveyances, infrastructure and premises. The Standards set out requirements in relation to the issues such as access paths, maneuvering ramps and boarding devices, allocated spaces, handrails, doorways, controls, symbols and signs, the payment of fares and the provision of information³.

WSCF strongly supports the Transport Standards for bus stop infrastructure and believes that they will improve the public transport service provided to the whole community, not only people with accessibility requirements.

WSCF would like to see stronger commitment to meeting the Transport Standards compliance timetable. The compliance timetable specifies that by 31 December 2007, 25 per cent of bus stops must be compliant with access paths, maneuvering areas, passing areas, ramps, waiting areas, boarding, allocated space, surfaces, handrails and grabrails, stairs, symbols, signs, TGSIs, lighting, street furniture and information. Unfortunately, the 2008

¹ Besser, L 2007, *Bus stop blues keep people away*, Sydney Morning Herald, 1 November 2007

² The Allen Consulting Group, 2007, Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Draft Report. Last Accessed 15 March 2011:
http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Humanrightsandantidiscrimination_Disabilitystandardsforaccessiblepublictransport

³ Attorney General's Department, 2006, Disability Standards for accessible public transport , last accessed 15 March 2011;
http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Humanrightsandantidiscrimination_Disabilitystandardsforaccessiblepublictransport

Draft Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport states that it is unlikely that 25 per cent compliance would be attained in 2007⁴.

WSCF view point on bus stop infrastructure

WSCF believes that transport planning should be considered through a 'whole of journey' approach, i.e. considering a transport journey from door to door. A whole of journey approach would consider bus stop infrastructure and the facilities that surround bus stops such as pedestrian and cycle ways are of equal importance to the bus service itself.

Unfortunately, there are several structural and policy blocks that hinder the timely and equitable upgrade of this infrastructure so that is accessible and an attractive component of the public transport service. WSCF has identified the following three key issues that need to be addressed.

1. Data collection on bus stop infrastructure

At present, the number of bus stops in Western Sydney that are accessible according to the Transport Standards with adequate passenger facilities is unknown to WSCF. This data appears to either be unknown by Government or simply unavailable to the public.

In late 2009, WSCF contacted councils across Western Sydney; including Blacktown, Liverpool, Auburn, Bankstown, Parramatta, Fairfield, Baulkham Hills, Blue Mountains, Holroyd, Penrith, Campbelltown, Woolondilly and Camden. The aim was to obtain data on Council's bus stop infrastructure budgets as well as data on the status of bus stops (how many; comply with Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport have seating, lighting, timetables and shelters etc).

Unfortunately, the majority of Councils were unable to supply WSCF with the information, and it was difficult to ascertain how many bus stops met the Transport Standards. It is apparent that there is no uniform approach to data collection around bus stop infrastructure. Each Council has its own way of determining bus stop infrastructure funding, the number of upgrades for each budget and the order of priority for upgrades.

This is further supported by the Local Government and Shires Association of NSW (LGSA) submission to the Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002. LGSA states;

The Associations have limited knowledge of how our member councils individually or collectively have progressed with the implementation of the Transport Standards. There

⁴ The Allen Consulting Group, 2007, Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Draft Report. Last Accessed 15 March 2011:
http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Humanrightsandantidiscrimination_Disabilitystandardsforaccessiblepublictransport

appears to be an absence of consistent data available on the extent of the infrastructure issue facing Local Government and the degree to which Councils are planning, progressing or implementing the Transport Standards⁵

In addition to contacting Local Governments to determine the state of the bus stop infrastructure in Western Sydney, WSCF contacted the Transport Data Centre enquiring after the number of bus stops in Western Sydney and the number which comply with the Transport Standards. The Transport Data Centre did not know the answer. WSCF acknowledges that at around the time of the Bus Network Review, Transport NSW undertook a major project to map all the bus stops in preparation for allocating bus stop numbers, and that this project has been disrupted by the changes to the bus routes by the implementation of the Bus Network Review. This project may have been able to collect data on the state of bus stop infrastructure in Western Sydney.

WSCF recommends that the project to map all bus stops for the allocation of bus stop numbers recommence. This is particularly important for residents of Western Sydney to be able to access 131500 information and the phone in for next bus service.

Furthermore, the 2008 Draft Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport does not provide any data on the progress of upgrades to bus stop infrastructure despite being able to provide data on a number of other measures across other modes of public transport. The Accessible Transport Action Plan for NSW Transport, Roads and Maritime Agencies available on the Transport NSW website also fails to provide any data on the level of bus stop infrastructure accessibility⁶, despite bus stop infrastructure being a vital component for people's ability to access a bus service.

WSCF believes that the availability of data about bus stop infrastructure and the associated budgets is important to establishing an overall picture of the scale of the infrastructure task ahead and monitoring the implementation.

To ensure public transport is accessible and operating as a viable and attractive alternative to the private motor vehicle, a uniform method of data collection across NSW is essential.

WSCF recommends that a uniform method of data collection be established and as a minimum, this data should include;

- **The number and location of bus stops**
- **The level of infrastructure present at each bus stop, and**

⁵ Appendix A

⁶ TransportNSW, Accessible Transport Action Plan for NSW Transport, Roads and Maritime Agencies, Last Accessed 15 January 2011; http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/using_trans/access-trans-action-plan.html

- **A breakdown by geographic location and bus network route on the progress of the implementation of the Transport Standards**

2. No uniform set of funding or implementation standards

Across NSW, the funding and implementation of bus stop infrastructure varies from local government to local government. It appears to WSCF that the priority of bus stop upgrades within the Council budget and the amount allocated each year is largely influenced by;

- Internal forces within the Council placing priority on bus stop infrastructure. Bus stop infrastructure often competes with pedestrian or cycling facility budgets.
- External forces such as bus company contacts, bus network planning and commercial arrangements with advertisement companies who pay for and maintain the bus stops they advertise at.

In the research undertaken by WSCF in 2009 on the state of bus stop infrastructure in Western Sydney, the level of priority each Council placed on bus stop infrastructure upgrades and maintenance was strikingly diverse. Some Councils were able to provide exact figures allocated to new infrastructure and the repair and maintenance of infrastructure as well as specific bus stops that would be upgraded through the year. Other Councils were either unsure of the exact figure, did not identify which bus stops would be receiving an upgrade or had no budget allocated for infrastructure because they were either in a commercial arrangement or they refused to invest in bus stop infrastructure in light of recent bus network changes by the NSW Government.

In addition to this, bus stop infrastructure funding can appear under varying budget lines such as 'advertisement' or 'cycling and pedestrian facilities' making it difficult to determine the level of resources allocated to bus stop infrastructure by each Council.

WSCF recommends that clear 'bus stop infrastructure' budget lines within Local Government budget be made mandatory across NSW. This should detail the budget allocated for bus stop infrastructure, including specific allocations for seating, lighting, signage, accessibility and pathways.

Concerns have been raised over the ability of Local Government to upgrade bus stop infrastructure to the scale and timeline required by the Transport Standards.

The 2008 Draft Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport found that;
Where local governments are smaller, with smaller budgets for bus services infrastructure, it is difficult to provide compliant infrastructure given the cost involved. As a result, non-compliance at 31 December 2007 is likely for a number of smaller local governments⁷.

⁷ The Allen Consulting Group, 2007, Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Draft Report. Last Accessed 15 March 2011:

The Local Government and Shires Association of NSW also assert that research conducted for the 2006 Local Government Inquiry in NSW suggests that Councils in NSW face an infrastructure renewal backlog of \$6.3 billion and an annual renewal gap of \$600million per annum⁸. This data raises the question of whether Local Government has the capacity to upgrade bus stop infrastructure to the scale that is required.

There are around 10,300 bus stops in Western Sydney⁹. One price given for installing a bus shelter puts it as \$17,685¹⁰. If a back of the envelope calculation is done, whilst setting a goal of making an additional 5,150 bus stops accessible with shelters, a one off investment of just over \$91 million would be required. It could cost \$13.6 million a year to maintain 7,500 bus stops¹¹, the newly built bus stops plus the existing ones.

WSCF recommends the following solutions to ensure the timely and equitable installation and maintenance of facilities appropriate to each bus stop in Western Sydney ;

- **An audit of bus stops is undertaken across the state to determine the number of and location of bus stops as well as the level of infrastructure present at each.**
- **State or Federal Government contribute funding towards the upgrade and maintenance of bus stop infrastructure**
- **Revenue from alternate sources such as the Parking Levy Scheme be invested in the upgrade and maintenance of bus stop infrastructure**

3. Multiple levels of responsibility and lack of coordination

WSCF believe that a public transport trip should be viewed as a door to door journey. Unfortunately, the current approach to public transport is fragmented with multitudes of stakeholders having responsibility for delivering individual components of the public transport trip.

The continuum of an accessible bus service involves:

- The Federal Government legislating the Transport Standards as part of the Disability Discrimination Act and setting a compliance timetable
- Individual Local Governments planning physical access to a service by providing foot paths, cycling and/or park and ride facilities as well as the physical infrastructure of a bus stop.

http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Humanrightsandantidiscrimination_Disabilitystandardsforaccessiblepublictransport

⁸ Appendix A

⁹ Transport Data Centre- purchased data set 2009

¹⁰ Tender T2008/16- *The Design, Manufacture and Installation of Bus Shelter*, www.warringah.nsw.gov.au/council_then/documents/200806101010.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/councilmeetings/pdfs/o10%20%5BEO>

- Transport NSW planning strategic, feeder and local bus network services and negotiating with Local Government around the planning of the services
- Funding and manufacturing accessible buses
- Bus companies delivering bus contracts and providing timetable information
- 131500 providing timetable information

Currie and Allen (2007) cite the fragmentation of transport responsibility as a key issue in the deliverance of accessible public transport¹². This is also supported by Austroads:

Accessible transport does not fit neatly into any single Council process or because the ‘whole of journey’ concept crosses a number of disciplines¹³

Acknowledging that local councils do not have financial resources to provide adequate facilities, that the current delivery of infrastructure is geographically inequitable and that there is no central collection of data, **WSCF recommends that an external body such as the Transport Construction Authority (TCA) cover the planning, building, managing and maintaining of all bus stops and interchanges.**

List of recommendations

- 1. A uniform method of data collection on bus stop infrastructure be established and as a minimum, this data should include;**
 - **The number and location of bus stops**
 - **The level of infrastructure present at each bus stop, and**
 - **A breakdown by geographic location and bus network route on the progress of the implementation of the Transport Standards**
- 2. Clear ‘bus stop infrastructure’ budget lines within Local Government budget be made mandatory across NSW. This should detail the budget allocated for bus stop infrastructure, including specific allocations for seating, lighting, signage, accessibility and pathways.**
- 3. WSCF recommends that the project to map all bus stops for the allocation of bus stop numbers recommence. This is particularly important for residents of Western Sydney to be able to access 131500 information and the phone in for next bus service.**
- 4. State or Federal Government contribute funding towards the upgrade and maintenance of bus stop infrastructure**
- 5. Revenue from alternate sources such as the Parking Levy Scheme be invested in the upgrade and maintenance of bus stop infrastructure**
- 6. An external body such as the Transport Construction Authority (TCA) cover the planning, building, managing and maintaining of all bus stops and interchanges.**

¹² Currie. G, Allen. J, 2007, ‘ Australians with disabilities: Transport Disadvantage and disability’ in *No way to go: Transport disadvantage in Australian Communities*, Monash University, Victoria

¹³ Austroads, 1999, ‘Accessible transport on low traffic bus routes, Austroads