



---

**Greater Manchester  
Passenger Transport Authority**

---

Your ref:

My ref:

Contact:

Direct line:

Date:

Strategy Unit Disability Team  
Cabinet Office  
4th Floor, Admiralty Arch  
The Mall  
London SW1A 2WH

19 April 2005

**Response of the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority (GMPTA) to the report from the Prime Ministers Strategy Unit, "Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People".**

The Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority (GMPTA) is the authority responsible for the public transport spending allocation in Greater Manchester. It is made up of 33 Councillors appointed by the 10 District Councils in Greater Manchester. The Authority funds the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTe), which is the body responsible for implementing the Authority's policies. We welcome the opportunity to comment on this important paper, which we believe has the potential to launch much need progress in the field of disabled transport access.

Public transport services are now operated by the private sector in Greater Manchester. Both the Authority and GMPTe work in partnership with transport operators and district councils, to develop and co-ordinate the public transport network across the county. This includes, funding the concessionary fares scheme, maintaining a network of subsidised bus services, secure schools service contracts, making provision for elderly and disabled people who are not able to use mainstream public transport, and building and maintaining local bus stations, shelters and stops. One of our key roles is to promote and provide information about public transport.

The report highlights the view that compared with able-bodied people, disabled people are 'more likely to experience problems with transport – the issue given most often by disabled people as their biggest challenge'. We are particularly pleased to see the importance attached to access in the report. We believe that transport is a key determinant to improving access to services for disabled people.

GMPTA/E's research with disabled people about their transport needs, shows that disabled people's priorities for public transport are the same as for non-disabled passengers: reliability; frequency; safety; good information; and affordability. Tackling these five priorities requires resources, and benefits the general public as well as improving access for disabled people. In addition to these priorities, which are amplified for disabled people, there are additional accessibility barriers, which are not faced by able-bodied people.

Disabled people express frustration at being unable to use mainstream public transport. They specifically highlight the lack of physical access. Less than 40% of buses in use in Greater Manchester are low floor easy access, with no onus on bus companies to fully comply until 2016 (for large single deck buses which form the majority of the Greater Manchester fleet). Whilst we welcome this target, it means disabled people in Greater Manchester will still have to wait over ten years for the entire bus network to be fully accessible.

There is currently no date for trains to be fully accessible. Although one is proposed, we would urge Government to move forward on this at the earliest possible date.

Accessibility regulations specifying the design of taxis are well overdue, and as yet there no statutory date by which all taxis must be accessible. Taxis and private hire vehicles are a vitally important source of transport for disabled people. Local authorities have powers to introduce conditions relating to accessibility when granting licences for taxis and private hire operators, but take up is poor. Measures to help local authorities, including adequate resource would be welcome in this regard.

The Government has only just issued proposals to lift in part the DDA Part 3 exemption for public transport infrastructure access. We welcome this would encourage government to make further progress in this area.

Currently public transport does not meet all the needs of non-disabled people, and providing equality of access to mainstream services for disabled people will not solve all their transport problems. The inaccessibility of mainstream public transport increases the pressure on specialist services like Ring and Ride / dial a ride, local authority special transport and the Ambulance Services (which are not covered by the DDA Part 3).

Disabled people also cite bus drivers' lack of awareness of the needs of disabled people as a major barrier to using mainstream public transport. Whilst GMPTA can ensure that contracts for subsidised services include the need for drivers to have disability awareness training (subsidised services account for less than 15% of bus services in the Greater Manchester area) for commercial services, this is not the case. Bus operators need to be encouraged by legislation to take a

lead in driver training. Lifting the DDA Part 3 exemption will help, but proper monitoring and enforcement will also be required.

Whilst GMPTE welcomes the commitment to travel training for disabled people, research we have undertaken shows a lack of capacity to deliver travel training, and lack of any recognised qualification for trainers in this important area of work. In 2005-6, GMPTE will publish good practice guidance on travel training and will provide grants to voluntary sector organisations that wish to initiate or expand their travel-training programme.

To provide true equality for disabled people, services above and beyond mainstream public transport need to be provided, even when mainstream services are as accessible as possible. GMPTA/E is taking a lead locally in integrating social needs transport to make the best use of accessible vehicles, whether they are operated by Ring & Ride/dial a ride type services, local authority education and social services departments, the health sector or the voluntary sector, with the ultimate aim of providing a seamless service for disabled people. We hope that this vision will be progressed with the aid of 'invest to save' funding, leading to an expansion of services to disabled people using existing resources.

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in pilot projects for the roll out of single assessments. We are well placed to understand the transport implications of independent living and the necessity when drawing up single assessment processes to give consideration to transport requirements. This includes, for example, eligibility for concessionary travel, opportunities for travel training, door-to-door travel opportunities, and availability of personal travel support.

As far as possible we agree with provision of individual choice for disabled people. However, we would urge government to significantly resource any forthcoming proposal.

Disabled people in Greater Manchester highlighted access to information as a barrier to accessing public transport. GMPTE have therefore carried out a review of public transport information provision. All publications and information are available in accessible formats and we are seeking to communicate in plain language all times.

GMPTE welcomes the commitment to make mainstream transport accessible to children and young people. GMPTE-funded yellow school buses are accessible to disabled children and the provision of a dedicated driver ensures that parents are confident about their children using the mainstream bus. There are resource implications to providing such a high level of service delivery. We would welcome work with Government to build on this success either through resources contained in the Second Local Transport Plan or through the forthcoming Transport innovation Fund.

The report calls for a review of existing definitions of disability. The existing DDA definition of disabled people and any changes to the definition should be crosschecked against eligibility for concessionary travel to ensure compatibility. The current exclusion of mental health problems as a criterion for concessionary travel, other than on the grounds of having been / would be refused a driving licence, is an issue for disabled people locally. Any changes will of course have an impact on cost of provision.

We agree that action is urgently needed to address poor access to transport, and we would welcome the resources to fully capitalise on this work. We also agree that it is right to seek, wherever possible, access to mainstream services for disabled people. However, we would warn that as public transport does not solve all the transport needs of the general public, even the most accessible public transport system will not be sufficient for all disabled people. To place too great an emphasis on the accessibility of mainstream services is to underestimate the problem. Travel training, personal assistance, efficient door-to-door services and cost of travel must be factored into improvement work, all of which present resource implications.

We welcome moves to involve Local Strategic Partnerships in the wider decision making process. In our area we would look to fully involve the ten district councils that comprise Greater Manchester, and other agencies involved in transport provision, a significant undertaking.

GMPTA/E is making progress with accessible transport and would welcome the opportunity to share best practice with other service providers, the Strategy Unit and the Social Exclusion Unit.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on this consultation and would be happy to build on any comments made at a later date.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PP - Nicholas C. C.', written in a cursive style.

Sir Howard Bernstein