

HANDBOOK FOR THE OPERATOR

This handbook is dedicated to public transport operators. The purpose is to provide suggestions in order to improve the service offered to disabled passengers.

URBAN, INTERURBAN AND SUBURBAN TRANSPORT

LAKE NAVIGATION

RAILWAY TRANSPORT

AIRPORTS

URBAN, INTERURBAN AND SUBURBAN TRANSPORT

When speaking about accessibility for disabled people, public transport operators mostly think to provide their lines with equipped vehicles.

Actually, there are at least three fundamental aspects that need to be taken into consideration in order to grant full accessibility of public transport lines: bus stop accessibility, the reliability of the information given to users and staff training for the use of all devices for disabled people.

So, factors contributing to make a bus line accessible to people with disabilities can be summarized as follows:

1. presence of equipped vehicles for the transport of disabled passengers;
2. bus stop accessibility;
3. reliable information concerning the arrival/departure time of equipped vehicles.
4. staff training focusing on how to use devices for disabled people

Now, let's analyse these aspects in detail.

Equipped vehicles for the transport of disabled passengers

In order to be fully accessible to people with disabilities, vehicles should have the following minimum characteristics:

1. step-free entrance (low floor bus)
2. Extractable platform to fill the gap between the entrance and the platform
3. specially allocated wheelchair spaces
4. Acoustic and visual signals to announce stops
5. Clear bus number, name or destination displayed on all sides of the vehicle.

From the interviews we made to public transport operators emerge that their equipped vehicles generally have the characteristics mentioned at points 1, 2 and 3 while just in few cases vehicles have the devices for sensory impairments mentioned at points 4 and 5. These two devices are in fact important and can contribute to improve service accessibility to all kind of users, both disabled and non disabled.

Some public transport operators admitted that several devices for disabled people often break down (this is particularly true for extractable platforms). This fact suggests the importance of regular services of devices.

Users noticed that sometimes the driving staff can't make devices for disabled people work. This underlines the need for operators to improve this aspect in the training process.

Bus stop accessibility

In order to grant good accessibility of public transport lines, it is not enough to have equipped vehicles but it is essential that bus stops have, considering the needs of users, the following characteristics:

- Step-free platforms or platforms with ramps
- When the platform is a "traffic-island", it is necessary that it is wide enough for a wheelchair to get on it
- Platform height should correspond to the height of vehicles
- No fixed barriers on the floor or other kind of obstacles preventing wheelchair movements
- Presence of tactile paths in order to reach stops
- Presence of seats or bearing surfaces
- Presence of platform roofing
- Presence of reliable, clear and readable information concerning next stops and departure and arrival timetable
- Presence of acoustic and visual signals concerning arriving vehicles.

Most of the interviewed operators were not able to provide information on bus stop accessibility. They said that the City Council or the Province, depending on whether urban or suburban lines were concerned, were competent on the subject.

It is thus almost impossible to have a reliable picture of the real accessibility of bus stops, thus preventing disabled people from using public transport.

It is thus necessary a higher collaboration between public transport operators and public bodies in order to find a solution to this situation, representing an obstacle to the use of public transport by disabled people.

Reliable information for disabled passengers

Some of the interviewed operators complain of the scarce use of their means of transport by disabled people, thus not allowing them to pay off the investments made to improve vehicles' accessibility.

Actually, one of the main obstacles to the use of public transport by disabled passengers is the lack of reliable information concerning arrival and departure time of equipped vehicles.

Generally, equipped vehicles correspond to a small percentage of the total amount of vehicles and operators do not have an official timetable where equipped vehicle trips are clearly pointed out.

In some cases, if informed in advance, public transport operators allow a disabled passenger to have an equipped vehicle for a certain trip. In other cases, by calling the operator in the morning, a passenger can know the availability and timetable of equipped vehicles for that day.

These two solutions can partly get around the lack of an official timetable for equipped vehicles. However, this information is not

spread and so in many cases potential disabled passengers just do not know.

Briefly, to promote a real use of public transport by disabled passengers, operators should improve the quality and quantity of information concerning the service offered. Without a clear and sharp communication policy, disabled passengers will not be in the condition of using such services that are at their disposal.

Staff training focusing on the use of devices for disabled people

The use of equipped vehicles for transporting disabled passengers implies specific service procedures and technical devices. Experience shows that sometimes the staff is not prepared to face these aspects and this can jeopardize the possibility for disabled people to travel. For example, there has been cases of drivers of equipped bus who didn't know how to take the bus close to the sidewalk or platform and didn't know how to make the platform go out thus complicating the operations of getting on and off of a disabled passenger in a wheelchair.

We suggest following staff training carefully as far as travelling needs of disabled people are concerned.

When speaking about urban transport, a separated reasoning should be made for **Metropolitana Milanese** (Milan's underground), operated by ATM and **Passante Ferroviario**, whose stations are operated by RFI, part of the Ferrovie dello Stato group.

Metropolitana Milanese

The crucial points concerning accessibility by disabled passengers are the following:

1. underground stations accessibility
2. direction signs inside stations
3. wheelchair locking systems inside trains

Let's analyse them in detail.

All stations of Line 3 (yellow line) are accessible thanks to lifts while most stations of Lines 1 and 2 (red and green lines) only have stairlifts, that most of the times are out of order and obsolete. Full accessibility of Milan's underground system should depend on a program of substitution of all stairlifts with lifts.

ATM is trying to equip all underground stations and platforms with direction signs for the sensory impaired (tactile paths, tactile maps, visual and acoustic signals at stops). At present, these direction signs haven't been introduced in all stations, so a disabled passenger doesn't know if he/she'll find such devices at the departure and arrival station. In order to grant a real independence and safety of a disabled person's journey, it is fundamental that all stations are equipped with these devices.

Wheelchair locking systems used on trains do not secure stability and safety of disabled people and this is particularly true for the system used on lines 1 and 2 (red and green lines) using a chain. It is necessary to equip all trains with more functional and safer locking devices.

Passante Ferroviario

The use of Passante Ferroviario points out a number of meaningful problems for people with disabilities.

Stations are operated by RFI, a company of the "Ferrovie dello Stato" group, while Trenitalia and Ferrovie Nord Milano operate trains passing through the Passante.

Because of this situation, it seems that there is no office or call center that might give information concerning station accessibility and the characteristics of the service offered to disabled people who, finally, cannot get information directly in order to use the service. It is fundamental to satisfy this need for information in favour of all passengers, disabled and not.

Stations are equipped with lifts. Certain large stations, with different exits, just have one exit equipped with only one lift, thus obliging a disabled passenger to walk through various corridors in order to reach the equipped exit.

Inside the stations it is essential to improve the direction system: direction signs are lacking and are often not very clear, while visual and acoustic signals on platforms are often out of order.

Passante has modern TAF trains (equipped for disabled people) and older and non accessible trains. An official timetable pointing out arrival and departure time of trains equipped for disabled people does not exist. It is not even clear if it is possible to book assistance service for boarding operations.

It will be very difficult for a disabled passenger to use Passante Ferroviario, until this gap of information will be filled.

LAKE NAVIGATION

In order to grant full accessibility of the service to disabled passengers, companies operating lake navigation should consider the following fundamental aspects:

1. boat accessibility
2. wharf accessibility
3. timetable information concerning the arrival of accessible boats
4. ticket office accessibility

Let's analyse these aspects in detail.

Boat accessibility

Generally speaking, boat accessibility for disabled passengers is granted by the presence of:

1. Gangways to get on/off the boat
2. Absence of passages with reduced width (< 75 cm)
3. Lift (only for boats with several levels)
4. Disabled toilet
5. specially allocated wheelchair spaces
6. visual and acoustic signals and orientation signs for the sensory impaired.

During our interviews, navigation companies declared that none of their boats is specifically designed for the transport of disabled people.

Generally, minimum accessibility is granted by boarding gangways and, only on bigger boats, lifts and disabled toilets.

Boats never have specially allocated wheelchair spaces and this can jeopardize the comfort and safety of these passengers.

It is necessary to give more attention to the orientation needs of the sensory impaired, by arranging suitable devices in order to grant them independence and safety.

Wharf accessibility

The main problem for disabled persons when getting on and off a boat is how to cover the gap between the boat and the wharf. This is generally done by using gangways, which should have the following characteristics:

- Are large enough to let a wheelchair pass (at least 70 cm)
- Are not too sloping (maximum gradient: 8%)
- Are made of anti-sliding material
- Have side handles

In order to grant getting on and off operations of disabled passengers, gangway accessibility is not the only element to consider.

Wharf accessibility can be prevented by:

- Presence of steps and other barriers to reach it
- Crazy paving or surfaces made with materials that are not suitable for wheelchair passage or for people with physical impairments (gravel, sand, etc.)
- Absence of suitable protections and tactile paths for the visually impaired.

Ticket office accessibility

Ticket offices of companies operating lake navigation are the infrastructures where you can buy tickets and get information on prices, boats and schedules.

To allow disabled people to fully use this mean of transport, it is important to make these infrastructures accessible.

We suggest eliminating architectural barriers and equipping the infrastructure with orientation and communication devices in order to satisfy the needs of all disabled passengers.

Timetable information on the arrival of accessible boats

During our interviews, navigation companies declared that none of their boats is specifically designed for the transport of disabled people.

Some of their boats are accessible to disabled passengers.

There are no official timetables with the arrival time of such boats and this does not allow a disabled passenger to plan the use of the service.

The company “Navigazione laghi Maggiore, Garda e Como” suggest calling during the day to get timetable information concerning accessible boats, while the company “Navigazione Lago d’Iseo” allows the customer to book ahead for a certain day and time an accessible boat on a certain line.

The fact is that they don’t have a clear communication policy pointing out which aspects of the service are accessible for

disabled passengers and what is the procedure to follow. The lack of this information and the consequent uncertainty on the accessibility of the service discourages disabled people from using this kind of transport.

RAILWAY TRANSPORT

In order to grant full accessibility of the service for disabled people, operators should consider the following points:

1. availability of trains with equipped coaches
2. railway station accessibility
3. clear and reliable timetable information on the arrival of equipped trains
4. assistance service for disabled passengers at arrival/departure stations

Let's now analyse these points in detail.

Trains with equipped coaches

Full accessibility of coaches is granted by:

- step-free access to get on the passenger coach (low floor)
- specially allocated wheelchair spaces
- Acoustic signals for blind people
- Visual signals for deaf people
- Disabled toilet

Only some models of trains (the most recent ones) have these characteristics. Some trains do not have any of these setting ups for disabled passengers. Other trains only have some of the above

mentioned characteristics for disabled people but do not have a low floor, consequently they have steps in the entrance. In these cases, a lifting truck, operated by the railway station's staff, grants access to the passenger coach (only where this service is provided).

When considering circulating trains, the most common setting ups for disabled people are disabled toilets and specially allocated wheelchair spaces.

We seldom find acoustic and visual signals for the sensory impaired.

On the contrary, it is essential that new trains in service are fully accessible to people with any disability and it is advisable that old, non accessible trains are substituted with equipped new ones.

Railway station accessibility

A railway station is fully accessible when it allows a disabled person to go independently and in total safety from the car park to the entrance and from the entrance to the main areas of the infrastructure: ticket office, waiting room, toilets and platforms.

Full accessibility and safety for a disabled passenger mean the elimination of all possible architectural barriers along these routes and the introduction of specific devices for the sensory impaired: clear direction signs, tactile maps, tactile safety features, visual and acoustic announcements.

Particularly, in order to reach the platforms, passengers have to use subways and they are not authorized to cross rail tracks.

Disabled passengers can use subways when there are lifts. Otherwise, they can get across the tracks by using a footbridge (subways with lifts are still few) but, in this case, they need to be accompanied by the railway station staff because this is not a safe operation.

It is thus essential that more and more platforms can be reached independently and in total safe by using subways with lifts.

When passenger coaches have a low floor, for a disabled passenger to be completely independent, the platform should be on the same level as the coach's entrance. On the contrary, in many stations platform's height is lower than needed and this requires planning a number of interventions.

The lack of an official and precise mapping on the degree of accessibility Lombardy's railway stations is a further obstacle to the use of the railway service by disabled passengers.

Timetable information on the arrival of equipped trains

Trenitalia has an official timetable where equipped trains are marked with the wheelchair pictogram. Disabled passengers using wheelchair can only travel on these trains, by booking the assistance service ahead.

Ferrovie Nord Milano's official timetable points out equipped trains with a note and a disabled passenger has to book the assistance service an hour in advance. As far as other trains are concerned, Ferrovie Nord allows a disabled passenger to send an application at least three days in advance and reserves the right to grant an equipped train for that day and time.

Generally speaking, the fact that official timetables give information on equipped trains is certainly positive for a disabled person who, at any time, can know which trains are equipped for the transport of disabled people.

Trenitalia does not foresee the possibility for a customer to require an equipped train on a line that, according to the official timetable, have a normal train.

This is an element of non flexibility of the service: a passenger in a wheelchair can only use equipped trains even if these are in days and times that are not suitable for his/her needs.

Ferrovie Nord Milano are more flexible because the company checks the possibility to satisfy the demand of a disabled passenger even when equipped trains are not scheduled.

On its website, www.trenitalia.it, Trenitalia has a section dedicated to disabled passengers and a leaflet called "I servizi per la clientela disabile" available at ticket offices.

It is desirable that Ferrovie Nord develops a communication policy that might be more explicit and specifically thought for disabled people.

Assistance service for disabled people

Both Trenitalia and Ferrovie Nord Milano provide an assistance service for disabled passengers for getting on and off the trains.

The service can be booked ahead, by following a procedure that is different according to the operator, but such procedure is always necessary for people in wheelchair.

The advance required is generally rather long and this doesn't allow disabled person to decide to undertake a journey in short terms.

Trenitalia requires booking at least 12 hours before departure, while Ferrovie Nord has a more articulated procedure because the request should be transmitted:

- 1 hour before departure, if the official timetable says that the desired train can transport people in wheelchair;
- 3 working days before departure for all other trains
- at least 5 days before departure for groups with more than one mobility impaired persons.

Both operators should make an effort in order to reduce significantly the advance required for booking.

Another problem concerns the fact that both operators can't grant the assistance service in all stations. Generally the service is present in all main stations, but in order to promote a real mobility of disabled passengers this service should be extended to other stations too.

Furthermore, for a disabled customer it is not always easy to know in advance which are the stations covered with the assistance service, particularly when dealing with minor stations.

We are still in a phase in which it has not been clearly defined which are the main points a disabled person can rely on when planning a journey. The procedure foresees that a disabled passenger sends his/her request without exactly knowing which

are his/her rights and where operators' discretionary power in accepting his/her booking end.

Some ambiguous situations should be solved as soon as possible in favour of clearer and better defined regulations and procedures. We suggest giving maximum attention to staff training, particularly when training concerns those people who will provide assistance and information service to people with disabilities.

AIRPORTS

The Lombardy Region has 4 accessible airports. Here are some suggestions as far as information and assistance services offered to disabled passengers are concerned.

Before getting to the airport

- It is necessary that operators improve specific communications to disabled passengers. This can be done by displaying clearly on their website simple and exhaustive information and by printing leaflets that can be found in airports, tourist offices, and travel agencies. Only SEA, the company operating at Linate and Malpensa airports, has printed a dedicated leaflet, with basic information on how to use these airports. The text can be downloaded from SEA's website. Also the airports of Bergamo and Montichiari (Brescia) should provide this

information for disabled passengers. Particularly, it is advisable that airports should advertise more effectively the availability of an assistance service for disabled passengers.

- There is a lack of clear and precise information on the accessibility of bus and trains connecting the airports to the surrounding area. Because of this lack of information, most of the times disabled passengers choose a private mean of transport such as a private car or a taxi to reach an airport.
- In parking areas, close to reserved car parks for disabled people, there should be interphones to call the staff in order to use the assistance service granted by the airport to disabled passengers. This only exists at Linate and Malpensa airports.

At the airport

- At the entrance of the airport there should be visible interphones at a height suitable also for people in a wheelchair in order to communicate with the airport assistance service for disabled passengers.
- Direction signs inside airports are not enough clear and effective for passengers in general, and this particularly affects the independence and mobility of disabled passengers.
- In order to allow physically disabled passengers to reach their seat, for boarding operations the staff uses a special wheelchair characterized by a very narrow seat. The use of such wheelchair is difficult for several disabled people. We

suggest doing this transfer just before boarding operations and not starting from the check in, as it usually happens.