



**CHARTER OF COMMITMENT OF THE TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES
OF THE EUROPEAN METROPOLITAN AREAS CONCERNING
THE ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT SYSTEMS
TO PEOPLE WITH REDUCED MOBILITY**

2003

ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN METROPOLITAN TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES

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Preamble

The association of European Metropolitan Transport Authorities (EMTA) was founded in 1998 so as to form a venue for exchange of information and best practices between the authorities responsible for organising public transport systems in the European metropolitan areas. It now brings together some 30 authorities, responsible for planning, improving, co-ordinating, and funding the transport systems of more than 70 million European city dwellers.

It is currently estimated that 12%¹ of the European population is disabled. The combined number of elderly and disabled people reaches 24% of the population, and figures taking into account people with a temporary impairment (people with luggage, prams, etc.) reach about 30%² of the overall European population, that is to say more than 100 million persons in EU25. With the ageing population, this number is expected to increase significantly over the coming years.

The issue of accessibility to all citizens of public transport systems is a major social objective. All citizens, regardless of disability or age, must have an opportunity for independent living, and accessible transport systems contribute in a determinant way to this goal. They increase educational, employment and recreational opportunities and can reduce social services and welfare costs to governments and communities. Moreover, it should be noted that all people benefit from accessible public transport.

Public transport systems shall provide an easy mobility for everyone. But in most cases, the reality doesn't meet this expectation. Old metro systems with stairs, high-floor buses and coaches, rolling stock not providing enough space for wheel-chairs, insufficient or badly devised information, etc.: the list of difficulties encountered by people with reduced mobility is endless.

Some progress has been made over the last decade, mostly under legal pressure³. The European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) has worked actively to raise the awareness of national governments on this issue. The European Commission has ordered several research projects on technical aspects⁴ and the international organisations active in public transport (UITP) have been working both on exchanging information on best practices and on the definition of standards. All these initiatives have benefited from the advice of organisations representing the interests of people with reduced mobility, like the European Disability Forum.

But in spite of these positive initiatives, a lot still remains to be done. Improving the accessibility of transport systems is a difficult challenge, which not only needs political support, but also takes time, needs technical expertise and can seem costly in a first approach. As a result, the majority of public transport vehicles and stations are still not accessible for people with reduced mobility in the European metropolitan areas⁵.

Improving the accessibility of public transportation systems has mostly been an issue of transport operators in the past. Operating companies have indeed a key responsibility in the management of the systems that must provide every day accessible services, and they usually have the technical expertise when it comes to setting standards for rolling stock and infrastructure.

Public transport authorities should be more involved in the process and could play a bigger role for the improvement of the accessibility of transport systems, for several reasons:

¹ Source: COST 335

² Source: ECMT

³ Source: ECMT report on legislation to improve access (2000)

⁴ COST 322 on low floor buses, COST 335 on heavy rail systems, COST 349 on long-distance buses

⁵ Source: EMTA Barometer of public transport in the European metropolitan areas (2000)

- **Public transport authorities are involved in the planning of transport systems from the very beginning**, and it is obvious that accessibility is more easy and cheap to achieve if it is taken into account at the initial stages of the process;
 - **Improving the accessibility of public transport systems is a complex task which implies to intervene not only on public transport systems, but also on their physical, social and legal environment**, and public authorities are best suited to have this coordinated approach. For example, improving the accessibility of bus routes often involves to have a special design for bus stops and the pavement around them, and only public authorities can have such a broad view;
 - **Public authorities are contributing large amounts of money to the funding of public transport systems and of public transport operations**. In many European cities, they are even the main contributors⁶. This fact gives them a key responsibility, but also a real clout in the design of transport systems. A Charter adopted by the Ministers of Transport (ECMT) in 1999 recommends that public funding of transport should be conditional on providing accessibility to people with reduced mobility⁷;
 - **Most public transport authorities are now bound to transport operators through contracts**, be it contracts awarded through competitive procedures or not⁸. These contracts often contain requirements about quality of service, which can include items like percentage of rolling stock accessible or availability of equipment like lifts in stations. They are therefore very powerful tools to prompt operators to pay a strong attention to this aspect of their activity which is complying with the need of all passengers and therefore achieve higher accessibility;
 - **The generalisation of competition for the award of contracts to operating companies often leads to the ownership of infrastructure and of rolling stock by public authorities**, which then lend or rent them to the operators for the length of the contracts. This gives public authorities a new responsibility for the definition of the physical characteristics of infrastructures and rolling stock, and leads them to direct contacts with the manufacturers. This implies that public authorities must develop their own expertise in this field and that they should ensure that this dimension is well taken into account in the process of design and of purchases of rolling stock;
 - **The provision of demand responsive door-to-door transport services in many cities for some categories of disabled passengers should be co-ordinated and complementary with the efforts to improve the accessibility of the mainstream public transport systems**. Information should take into account these two categories of services and advise people which services best meet their needs. This is once again a mission of public authorities;
 - And lastly, as strong differences can be witnessed in the levels of accessibility of public transport networks between the European countries, the survey of the most advanced countries (Scandinavian countries) could help public authorities in the other countries to learn fast from the cases of best practices. Therefore, **benchmarking between public transport authorities should be regarded as a permanent process of improvement**;
- In this context, the public transport authorities represented in the EMTA association commit themselves, both on an individual level and collectively, to improve the accessibility to people with reduced mobility of the public transport systems they are responsible for.

⁶ Source: Comparative survey of funding of public transport in the European metropolitan areas (ATM/EMTA, 2001) and EMTA Barometer of public transport in the European metropolitan areas (2000)

⁷ Source: ECMT Charter on access to transport services and infrastructure (1999)

⁸ Source: What public transport authorities for the European metropolitan areas? (S. Lecler/EMTA, 2001)

Resolutions

The public transport authorities of the European metropolitan areas represented in the association EMTA commit themselves to:

- 1 - **Consider the improvement of the accessibility of their transport systems as a major social objective**, which benefits all passengers, and which shall not be left under the sole responsibility of transport operators;
- 2 - **Co-ordinate their actions with the other public authorities so as to tackle the issue of accessibility of transport systems under all its aspects**, concerning for example the way stations and bus stops are physically organised;
- 3 - **Take into account the needs of people with reduced mobility for each of their decisions**, so as to ensure that no decision might harden the mobility conditions of people with reduced mobility;
- 4 - **Develop master plans of improvement of the accessibility of the public transport systems** under their jurisdiction, with the ultimate objective to provide barrier-free, fully accessible, transportation systems;
- 5 - **Ensure that people who cannot access public transport systems have at their disposal a door-to-door accessible transport service** which is both of high quality and affordable in the territory concerned;
- 6 - **Ensure that information about public transport systems is clear, comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible to all people**, including persons with learning difficulties. This concerns both before trip and on-board information. Accessible information means information provided by redundant channels (visual and vocal, for example);
- 7 - **Develop their own expertise in the field of accessibility**, which encompasses both issues related to infrastructures, rolling stock, and information;
- 8 - **Consult experts and representative organisations of people with reduced mobility on a regular basis**, and especially before reaching decisions concerning accessibility of public transport systems, so as to ensure that the solutions chosen really meet the expectations of the people they are aimed at;
- 9 - **Follow-up carefully the results achieved by any measure aimed at improving the accessibility of public transport networks to people with reduced mobility**. This includes the technical performance of equipment, and the satisfaction of the users;
- 10 - **Define and measure at regular intervals indicators reflecting the level of accessibility of the networks they are responsible for** (number of metro stations accessible, number of low floor buses, number of routes with visual or vocal information);
- 11 - **Identify in their structures some senior managers responsible for co-ordinating accessibility issues**, which are transversal topics concerning most aspects of the missions of transport authorities (new infrastructures, contracts with operators, information, etc.);
- 12 - **Regularly look at policies carried out in other cities so as to identify the best practices and learn from the successful experiences**. Benchmarking is a useful tool to make progress faster and in a cheaper way;
- 13 - **See to it that the transport companies in charge of operating the transport systems pay a strong attention to the accessibility of their networks**. Accessibility should be a major requirement in tendering procedures, and when contracts between authorities and operators contain incentives based on quality of service, accessibility should be part of them;
- 14 - **Communicate on the efforts made to improve accessibility and ensure that the achievements receive wide coverage in the society**;
- 15 - **Contribute to the adoption of standards for the technical characteristics of equipment designed for accessible public transport systems** that shall be unified at the European level.