

FAO Mr Peter Faross
European Commission
Directorate-General for Energy and Transport
Head of Unit A5
Rue de la Loi 200
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Brussels

Our Ref: MACS 5/15
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Dear Mr Faross

**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING PAPER – RIGHTS OF PASSENGERS IN
INTERNATIONAL BUS AND COACH TRANSPORT**

The Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) was set up in May 2002 as the Scottish Executive's statutory adviser on disability issues in relation to transport and transport policy in Scotland. MACS welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals for strengthening passenger rights on international bus and coach journeys.

The Committee's Road and Pedestrian Environment Working Group considered the consultation document and I am replying as Chair of the Working Group on behalf of MACS.

The working group has concentrated on the questions which relate to people with mobility difficulties and our comments are attached as Annex A to this letter.

We hope these comments are useful.

Yours sincerely

Alan Rees
Acting Chair, Road and Pedestrian Environment Working Group

Need to regulate

Question 1: Given that passengers of other modes of transport enjoy many rights under international or Community regulations which are not offered to bus and coach passengers, do you agree that equal treatment (a “level playing field”) should be ensured between bus and coach operators in different Member States in terms of protection of passengers’ rights?

Answer: Yes.

Question 2: Should this be addressed at EU level? What are the most cost-effective means to meet this objective?

Answer: Yes. Given international coach services, hard to see how anything other than the EU level will deliver the desired outcome. However, national agreements will have to be obtained if regulations are to be accepted and enforced.

Scope of regulation

Question 3: Should only international services be regulated and domestic services be left to each Member State?

Answer: No. Passengers need the same rights regardless of whether a service is within one EU country or between EU countries. Also, from an operator's viewpoint, it is better to have one set of regulations/guidelines with which one is required/expected to comply.

Question 4: Is any legislative action necessary to improve intermodality between coach services and other modes of transport? If so, what action in particular?

Answer: Standards between different modes should be harmonised as far as possible e.g. on insurance liability and compensation.

Persons with reduced mobility

Question 19: Should coach operators be required to provide assistance to persons with reduced mobility?

Answer: Yes. All coach operators should be mindful of a need to enable their service to be accessible and thus inclusive for all people, and in doing so there maybe a need for assistance to be provided, and consideration in providing information and accessible ticketing systems.

Question 20: What should the assistance for persons with reduced mobility consist of?

Answer: Whatever is reasonably required. Difficult to have a comprehensive list for all eventualities. However, it may be possible to deal with the issue of the reasonable level of assistance that could be expected from the driver. Unlike scheduled bus services, where the driver is usually required to stay behind the wheel, a coach driver is already in an environment of providing individual assistance: e.g. loading luggage.

This could be extended to the provision of assistance to boarding/alighting, getting to/from a seat etc. For those people that have reduced mobility by the lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity of the vehicle and terminals, these people being those with a sensory loss (blind, partially sighted, and deaf/blind), then there would be a need of familiarization to such areas as where toilets were located (terminals and on vehicles), overhead locker spaces on vehicles, visual and auditory announcements on vehicles etc.

Assistance could also include the provision of information, booking facilities, reduced fares for companions, travel aids such as buggies at terminals and specially reserved seats next to entrances.

Question 21: Should coach operators be required to provide for the transport of equipment for persons with reduced mobility (i.e. wheel chairs). Given the design of their vehicles is this feasible?

Answer: Providers should be working towards the ability to have the type of vehicles that would provide the space to carry equipment. It is technically feasible: operators complain that their margins are so tight that any reduction in seating capacity (to allow for mobility aids) may make a particular service uneconomic. Once again, there should be a presumption in favour of an automatic provision of reasonable adjustments to enable the transport of such equipment.

Question 22: Should any rules on facilities and assistance for persons with reduced mobility also be extended to urban transport? What are the existing practices and obligations in Member States?

Answer: Yes. Travel by international bus and coach will only be a viable option if passengers are satisfied that they can travel on other modes of transport, including public transport at the start and end of the completed journey. Member states should be obliged to adopt policies for achieving this. At the moment practices differ widely and should be raised to attain the best level.

Question 23: Should the same treatment be offered to persons travelling with small children?

Answer: Yes: we shouldn't be listing classes of people who need assistance. Anyone with a need should receive the assistance required to enable the journey to take place. However, the problem with blanket terms such as "assistance" is that they can be interpreted very loosely. Not sure if we would say that "assistance" extends, for example, to financial assistance beyond that offered via concessionary schemes.

Question 24: How and when should the coach operator be notified of the need for assistance for persons with reduced mobility?

Answer: The onus is on the operator to make known to passengers what services are (are not) available and how they can be accessed. Notification of need would normally be at the time of booking to enable operators to put into place the assistance required. However, advance notification procedures should not be used by the operators as a means of putting in place a barrier to enabling people to travel. People with reduced mobility may have at times the same needs as anyone else of travel at short notice, and this should be borne in mind, otherwise if they are unable to undertake travel at short notice when others who do not have reduced mobility are able to travel, they could be being seen as being discriminated against.

Question 25: Should any additional facilities be available at coach terminals?

Information should be accessible for all, which would include visual and auditory announcements. A safe waiting area, where help could be provided if necessary; the presence of accessible toilets. Some people may require help with orientation around the terminals, such as, location of ticketing, shops, café, and waiting areas, as well as help in locating specific bus platforms, this help maybe physical but also just in giving adequate information. Clear arrival and departure arrangements are also necessary e.g. car parking, interchange with other transport modes etc.

Question 26: What conversion/adaptation of coach terminals could be required in order to provide persons with reduced mobility with adequate assistance?

Answer: Depends on current situation. Clear signage, minimum walking distances, waiting rest areas, use of mobility aids and equipment as well as approved access improvements re. lifts, ramps, tactile paving, accessible loos etc. etc..

Question 27: Should organisations representing persons with reduced mobility be involved in consultations concerning all identified shortcomings in bus and coach transport?

Answer: Yes. Organisations **of** people with reduced mobility, not just those **for** such people.

Quality standards

Question 28: Is there a need to establish quality and reliability standards for international coach services at EU level? Or should coach operators be required to develop public quality standards for international services?

Answer: Yes. Why risk having different minimum standards in different EU countries or between different operators? Operators would still be free to enhance the minimum standards. The important point is to ensure that any EU standards are high quality, and not the lowest common denominator.

Question 29: If so, how should compliance with the quality standards be monitored?

Answer: Through existing regulatory mechanisms plus consumer feedback.

Question 30: What essential performance indicators should be measured and disclosed by coach operators? Is the following list of quality standards adequate?

- Punctuality (departures, arrivals, stops en route)
- Delays
- Level of user satisfaction
- Cancellations
- Interruption of journey
- Comfort
- Accessibility for persons with reduced mobility

Answer: Should include Number of complaints; Satisfaction with driver/driving; and accessibility of information.

Some of these performance indicators require the operator to conduct consumer surveys.

Information obligations

Question 31: Which of the conditions of carriage should be at least mentioned on the ticket?

Answer: Who/how/when contact for issues relating to travel for persons with reduced mobility? One problem is that there is only so much information one can get on a ticket. If tickets are going to contain vital information, what about alternative formats for visually impaired people?

Question 32: Should standard conditions of carriage be attached to passengers' tickets?

Answer: Yes, but there is a need for different formats - accessible information may need to include translations.

Question 33: How can access to information on conditions of carriage and fares be improved?

Answer: Range of formats to meet different needs of passengers.

Question 34: How should information for persons with reduced mobility be provided (text, audio support)?

Answer: Plain and simple language. Any written material to be provided using RNIB's See it Right Guidelines. Visual and auditory announcements at terminals and on coaches. Large print and Braille. Accessible to all.

Self-regulation

Question 47: How should the European Commission encourage self-regulation schemes aiming at improving users' rights?

Answer: By publishing a model scheme.

Question 48: To what extent should passengers have to rely on voluntary commitments by bus and coach operators?

Is there any evidence that voluntary commitments work? Voluntary may equal variable. See Q 28. Regulation makes it clear for both operators and users of the service.

Integrated ticketing

Question 49: What is your opinion on inclusion of coach services in integrated ticketing systems?

Answer: Yes should be included if feasible.