

## **VLAAMSE VERVOERMAATSCHAPPIJ VVM DE LIJN'S ACCESSIBILITY POLICY**

### **The long and winding road to inclusive public transport**

#### **(1) ACCESSIBLE ROLLING STOCK**

VVM De Lijn's fleet actually consists of 2020 buses and 339 trams.

1058 buses are already fully accessible for wheelchair-users.

These "accessible" buses can be identified by the accessibility sticker, showing a WHITE WHEELCHAIR against a blue background.

All "Hermelijn" trams of the second generation (34 vehicles) are fully accessible .

As to the coastal tram, 33 out of 49 trams are accessible for persons with reduced mobility.

16 coastal trams, not accessible today, are being equipped with a ramp facilitating access for handicapped people.

When do we categorise a bus as being fully accessible?

Objective criteria for assessing accessibility

- The bus is equipped with a LOW FLOOR (standard height = 35 cm)
- The bus is able to "kneel down" , thus lowering the bus floor with 7 cm
- There are no metallic bars dividing the bus entrance into two separate parts or making the entrance smaller
- The bus is equipped with a fold-out convertible ramp

A tram is considered to be accessible if it has a low floor combined with a folding ramp.

What is the deadline for fully accessible VVM De Lijn rolling stock?

Since 1990, VVM De Lijn has begun to buy low-floor buses, although not systematically.

Since 2002 however, VVM De Lijn purchases exclusively low-floor buses

Right at this moment, 1255 buses are already equipped with low floors.

Within a period of 5 years, 100% of the bus fleet owned by De Lijn will be fully accessible for wheelchair users.

Identical accessibility criteria will be imposed on VVM De Lijn 's private subcontractors.

Trams have a longer lifecycle ( 36 years) than buses (14 years)

Quite logically, it will therefore take more time to make the tram fleet fully accessible.

In 2022, the last obsolete PCC trams will be taken out of service and all Flemish trams will from then on be fully accessible.

#### **(2) ACCESSIBLE BUS AND TRAM STOPS**

##### **Cities first, followed by priority stops**

VVM De Lijn public transport network covers 40 000 bus and tram stops.

Since it is unthinkable to transform all of these 40 000 bus and tram stops into accessible stops, working in phases seems unavoidable.

Urban public transport networks are given the highest priority, as far as accessibility is concerned. The highest number of passengers is being transported by the PT network in urban areas.

The number of bus/tram stops that have to be adapted is relatively modest in urban surroundings.

During a second phase, we will gradually tackle bus/tram stops frequently visited by wheelchair users.

## **PROGRESS IN ANTWERP**

During recent years, investment in accessible PT infrastructure has been quite considerable in Antwerp: the redesigning of the City Boulevards (“Leien”), tram line 3, Astridplein and the prolongation of existing tram lines. (Mortsel for ex)

It was an obvious choice to give priority to the accessibility of 2 premetro-(underground) stations “Meir” and “Sport”

“Meir” premetro station is situated in the midst of a relatively accessible shopping area (Meir) serving tram lines 2,3 and 15.

Antwerp Central Station lies within walking distance.

It was possible to adapt this premetro-station in a relatively short period of time.

For our premetro-station “Sport” the big events organised in the Sports Palace and attracting huge masses, provided excellent reasons for investing in improved accessibility

### **Shopping area Meir and Sports Palace accessible for everybody**

From the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2005 onwards, the premetro stations “Meir” and “Sports” have been made accessible for persons with reduced mobility.

The installation of an elevator and automatic doors have transformed 2 major attraction poles (shopping area Meir and Sports Palace) into accessible areas for wheelchair users.

We also tackled the guiding devices for blind people and persons with reduced eyesight. In order to avoid inappropriate use of the elevator by non-handicapped persons (which would reduce the capacity for people with reduced mobility) the speed of the elevator was slowed down.

### **Future accessibility projects in Antwerp**

Now that premetro-stations “Meir” and “Sports” have been made accessible, premetro station “Diamant” is the next tram stop figuring on our priorities list.

This station situated in the immediate neighbourhood of Antwerp’s Central Station will be made accessible.

The accessibility of premetro station “Opera” will depend on the second phase of the renewing of the city boulevards (Leien)

## **ACCESSIBILITY OF THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORK**

### **Functioning of an accessible urban public transport network**

**In Flanders nowadays, only 8 urban areas (Diest, Genk, Hasselt, Knokke-Heist, Sint-Truiden, Tongeren, Turnhout en Wetteren) can offer a guarantee that wheelchair users can travel on some city lines.**

**Using an electronic reservation system, mobility-impaired persons can request an accessible bus/tram ride by calling the “Belbus”-callcenter (demand-responsive buses)**

**The following criteria constitute the definition of “accessible line”**

**A line being accessible means in practice:**

- **There is a seat available on the bus (one wheelchair-user for each bus trip)**
- **The bus is accessible and equipped with fold-out ramp and low floor**
- **Bus/tram stop is accessible (minimum width en height of pavement and inclination/gradient not to steep)**

**When a request for an accessible trip is received and one of the above conditions is not fulfilled , the dial-a-ride call center operator looks for an alternative and suggest an earlier or later trip, or another bus stop.**

**Only when there is absolutely no feasible alternative available, VVM De Lijn sends a special bus equipped with an elevator.**

**On top of this, the dial-a-ride call-center operator informs the mobility-impaired passenger on alternative operators offering accessible transport services (subsidised services for adapted transport, taxi services)**

### **Our plans for the future**

**The 1<sup>st</sup> March 2006 will be an important milestone in the road towards accessible public transport**

**From that day onwards, the entire urban public transport network in Antwerp will be fully accessible.**

**Elsewhere in Flanders, significant progress will be observed in the short run.**

**The timescale depends , among other parameters, on agreements to be concluded with local authorities and the time needed to make bus/tram stops accessible and to offer specific training courses for our bus/tram drivers.**

**The following regions are priority areas:**

- **West-Flanders: Ostend, Kortrijk, Bruges, Blankenberge, Ieper, Waregem, Tielt, Torhout, Diksmuide, Veurne and Poperinge**
- **East-Flanders: Oudenaarde, Deinze, Eeklo, Ronse, Ninove, Geraardsbergen, Sint-Niklaas, Zottegem, Lokeren, Dendermonde, Ghent and Aalst**
- **Antwerp: urban network Antwerp**
- **Flemish Brabant: Tienen, Aarschot and Haacht.**
- **Limburg: Since Limburg can already boast an extensive accessible public transport offer in its urban areas, we intend to create an accessible regional bus line between Hasselt and Heusden-Zolder and another one between Hasselt and Diest.**

## **BUS/TRAM DRIVERS AND THE DUTY OF ASSISTANCE**

**Installation cash-boxes completed 1<sup>st</sup> March 2006**

**VVM De Lijn wants to ban all forms of discrimination between wheelchair users and other categories of passengers.**

**In order to achieve this objective, high security cash boxes will be installed on all low-floor buses, before 1<sup>st</sup> March 2006 at the latest.**

**Today, 484 buses accessible for wheelchairs are already equipped with such security devices. Some 700 buses are due to be equipped with these high security cash-boxes in the near future.**

**Driver will assist mobility-impaired passenger**

**VVM De Lijn urges all bus/tram drivers to assist mobility-impaired persons getting on and off the bus/tram.**

**If both the vehicle and the bus/tram stop are accessible, the bus /tram driver has to get out of his vehicle to assist the passenger.**

**VVM De Lijn asks the non-handicapped passengers to show some patience and understanding for the diminished punctuality, resulting from this duty of assistance. Bus/tram drivers will receive a didactic brochure , explaining how to handle mobility-impaired passengers. Specific training courses on how to treat handicapped persons will be organised by VVM De Lijn.**

**If the wheelchair –user is unable to board a bus/tram , because of practical reasons (entrance door too small, non-accessible bus/tram stop, no seats available) the driver will get out of his/her bus/tram to give an explanation to the wheelchair user.and hand out a brochure on the accessibility policy of De Lijn.**

**The driver will also make concrete proposals for alternative ways of travelling, helping the mobility-impaired passenger to reach his/her destination.**

**Assistance by accompanying person and co-passengers**

**VVM De Lijn will inform mobility-impaired persons about the free travel pass for persons accompanying a handicapped person.**

**All passengers will be kindly requested to show their solidarity by assisting the driver in his professional duties.**

## **INCLUSIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

**VVM De Lijn is convinced that accessibility is not only a problem for a small group of handicapped persons. Improving accessibility benefits all passengers and improves the overaal quality of public transport in general.**

**Some passengers are temporarily mobility-reduced (families carrying small babies, people with broken legs and the elderly**

**Maintaining close personal contacts with relevant and representative interest groups and getting specialised consultancy is needed for implementing this INCLUSIVE accessibility policy.**

**Therefore, VVM De Lijn cooperates closely with the Accessibility Bureau.**

**Mechelen, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2005**  
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**Vlaamse Vervoermaatschappij VVM De Lijn**