

Cross Party Group (CPG) in the Scottish Parliament on Disability – Minutes 2 December 2015

PRESENT:

Michael McMahon MSP
George Adam MSP
Helen Hunter (Quarriers)
Lorne Berkley (Quarriers)
John S. Miller (Action Duchenne)
Stan Flett (Aberdeen Action on Disability)
Kayleigh Thorpe (Enable)
John M. Ballantine (SATA)
Mike Harrison (SATA)
Susan Grasekamp (SDEF)
Ian Smith (Inclusion Scotland)
Robert MacBean (National Autistic Society Scotland)
Rob Murray (Changing Faces)
Cheryl Matheson (Remploi)
Philippa Faulkner (Leonard Cheshire Disability)

1. Welcome and introductions

Michael McMahon welcomed everyone to the CPG on Disability. He explained apologised for cancelling the last meeting scheduled for 2 September at such short notice. This was unavoidable.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting of 3 June were approved with no objections raised.

3. Derek MacKay MSP, overview of the Scottish Government's transport accessibility plans

Derek McKay said he was delighted to discuss the matter of transport accessibility with the CPG.

He outlined the Governments Vision for transport which is about affordability, accessibility and making the right connections across the country. He wants to develop a door-to-door service. The vision is for high quality, interconnected transport.

There is emphasis on developing a national smart ticketing scheme which operates cross transport and cross borders. This work is being informed by the Mobility Access Committee on public transport. Earlier this year it explored issues and challenges disabled people face including the level and quality of service.

Railways – We can expect the rolling stock and access to service within the rail franchise to increase. There are high expectations on Abellio/Scotrail in delivery of this public contract.

Ferries – There is a need to improve accessibility

Buses – There are no plans for regulation of buses. The Government has made a financial commitment to continue with the National Concessionary Travel Scheme for a further two years. There is ongoing engagement/work with key groups to ensure sustainable accessible services. The Government is also backing Sandra White's Responsible Parking Bill. There is some doubt about whether this Bill will be progressed as the Parliament may not be competent to legislate on this. The Minister has given a commitment that the Government will legislate on this in this eventuality. He reaffirmed the importance of removing obstructions to make footways more accessible.

4. Questions and Discussion

Michael McMahon raised the issues that were discussed at the previous meeting on 3 June when Abellio and Scotrail presented to the CPG. This related the issue of priority between cycles and wheelchairs for spaces on trains.

Derek MacKay said there has to be a degree of fairness and balance. He recognised the need for both but said we need a practical policy. Adding that there is a very strong cycling lobby. He said he expects to see more dedicated wheelchair space as part of the refurbishment plan. There may need to be some compromise on reasonableness. There is a legal case on going on this issues relating to buses and priority between wheelchair users and buggies. Sometime the Government can make policy but it is up to the courts to interpret it.

Stan Flett said that Abellio have stated that they will introduce racks for cycles at stations for rental. There is a need to create space for both. Abellio has committed to introduce more bike and go schemes. In future the trains will have more dedicated space. At the moment where there is space for one there is likely to be space for two in future

Derek MacKay said this was a good point. Currently the potential of car hire schemes is being explored.

Mike Harrison asked about the Transport Strategy and Action Plan and whether this is available and accessible.

Derek MacKay said the National Transport Strategy is not publicly available yet. It has just been agreed by local government. He made a commitment to make this available before Christmas and to circulate it to the CPG.

Make Harrison asked if there will be any opportunity to comment on the strategy.

Derek MacKay said not on the document itself but the strategy poses a number of questions that the Government wants to hear about. There will be a second document and Action plan and there will be opportunities to feed into this. There are members of the steering group present at this meeting involved in feeding into this process and consulting. The next Parliament will review the Strategy.

Helen Hunter asked is there any research around barriers for wheelchair users – how many people would use railways if less barriers? What is the demand for accessibility?

Derek MacKay said Abellio is developing intelligent systems which will pick up demand. Minister said he would explore with Abellio how they assess demand and unmet need.

The minister was asked about disability training and whether regulation would help. The Enables campaign on bullying was highlighted and the fact that buses are often a location where people are targeted.

Derek MacKay said that there are different pockets of work. Interaction with transport staff can make a difference to people with disability therefore it is important that staff have some level of awareness. Many disabled people tell us they are bullied on trains/transport and often rely on staff to make sure they are treated properly.

An example of the airports was given re accessibility. They have made extensive efforts to ensure the rights of disabled people are met. Glasgow Airport work with the Access Panel and since that time improvements have been made. Human experience is important but policies have got to be right too.

In terms of training it is important to identify key points and co-produce what a training programme looks like. Being aware of passenger issues is very important.

Mike Harrison asked if the smart ticketing system will be a genuinely all-inclusive ticket service.

Measurement of doors can be an issue on local buses for wheelchair users. Smart ticketing – Oyster Cards – would help if had tactile pads for card.

Derek MacKay said that trying to achieve one card of device that brings everything together is not easy because there are different contractors. Bus companies want to phase it in and create regional schemes as a platform for national vision.

Access Panels can be a conduit to making progress across all transport issues. The Minister said that Community Planning should pick up local issues.

Ian Smith said he welcomed the Minister's commitment to co-production but stresses the need to think about disabled people at the design stage before building is started. He cited Waverly station as an example where this had not happened.

Access to taxis is a problem. Community Transport is not part of the concessionary travel.

Derek MacKay said there are no resources to extend concessionary travel to community transport. He agrees with the point made about co-production. Nothing should be built today that's inaccessible.

John S. Miller said he was pleased to hear the Minister mention communities. He said it is expensive to hire vehicle to take young people to participate in sport activities. There was a para-Olympic session run for children in Stirling but some don't have a mobility care and taxis are expensive.

Derek MacKay said he is doing bit of work re taxis with Gordon Aikman. He appreciates the point. Sometimes we are reliant on the good will of bus companies. Quality of buses in Scotland getting better. Edinburgh bus service is a good example. There is a Petition in front of Parliament lodged to standardise equipment on transport.

The issue of difficulties of visually impaired people on trains especially when going from one train to another was discussed. There is a difficulty of buttons and sign being are different heights and shapes.

5. CPG Manifesto for 2016 Election

Lorne and Helen raised the idea of producing a CPG Manifesto in advance to next year's Scottish Parliament Election in May.

It was agreed that we would produce a report of issues that had been discussed and raised at the group over the past session, what had been achieved and where the CPG felt there was still more work to do.

The will be circulated with members of the group in advance of the next meeting.

6. AOB

Ian Smith will send Helen some information on new project to be circulated with CPG members.

7. Date of Next Meeting

2nd March 2016 – 1pm.