Communication accessibility issues of V/Line train travel for people with disabilities

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Access – Physical & Social  (Universal Access)

Social Inclusion demands both physical and social access

Communication is integral to social access

Communication access occurs when people are respectful and responsive to individuals with communication difficulties, and when strategies and resources are used to support successful communication

(Communication Resource Centre, Scope, 2013)
Background

V/Line – state-wide train/coach network.

In 2012/13 served 14.72 million passengers with 1493 staff

**Mission:** To deliver customer-focused, safe and efficient regional passenger transport and rail freight access.

**Values:**
- Safety underpins everything we do: safety is paramount
- Think customer: the customer is the centre of our service system
- Act with integrity: we operate professionally and ethically
- Raise the bar: we strive to improve ourselves and our business
- Deliver as one V/Line: we join-up to achieve outcomes

**Aim:** To become communication accessible by 2015
Research aim to investigate communication accessibility of V/Line Services

- Systematic investigation barriers and facilitators of V/line rail towards communication access

- Perspectives of customers with communication difficulties and staff at the front line.

- People with communication difficulties diverse group –
  - people ‘who have difficulty telling you what they want, understanding what you’re saying or gaining information through usual written or verbal means’.
To fully investigate current issues

What are the problems; what works well – what might help

- Experience and expectations of people with communication difficulties who use V/Line services.
- Staff skills, attitudes and knowledge about communicating with people who have communication difficulties.
- Practical strategies staff currently use to communicate with people who have communication difficulties.

- Strategies to improve V/Line responsiveness to people with communication difficulties
Method

Customers

21 people with communication difficulties (included people with autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, people who are deaf and deaf-blind)

- 9 in 2 focus groups
- 12 individual open ended interviews
Method

Staff

24 staff (mainly customer service, conductors, booking office, call centre, travellers aid)

- 11 in 3 Focus groups
- 13 in individual interviews

Staff Survey

- 161 staff across the system – 111 front line
Key Findings - Customers

Staff attitudes and interpersonal communication

- Positive and helpful attitudes – most of the time
- Uneven responsiveness to communication needs.
- Supporting physical access importance of communication

Customer suggestions for improvement

- Understand diversity
- Talk to people directly
- Use of low tech tools such as communication board
- Same expectations as other customers re tickets
- Help being offered - rather than having to ask
Key Findings - Customers

Information and Infrastructure

- Timetables, other printed or online materials
- Signage – at the station
- Difficulties finding the right train unrelated to signage
- Signage and announcements – on the train
- Communicating changes
- Other forms of supports - other customers

Making complaints

Inconsistencies in the System and Between Staff
Key findings – Staff

Perspectives of V/Line Staff about Communication Access

- Reflected views of customers - committed, resourceful, good communicators

- Frequent interaction with people who have communication difficulties.
  - 70% of the four focal occupational groups either a weekly or daily basis.

- Experienced in disability 72% either in their family or prior work life.

- Positive attitudes and comfortable interacting (av 9.54, wide potential min and max 5-35; least discomfort conductors 8.86).
Staff Training

- High level of general customer service training
- Proportion with training decreased as it became more specialist
- Conductors most training-most trained more than 12 months ago
- Training perceived as useful – some impact on ease of communication
- Occupational groups differed in groups most difficulty communicating with
Key Findings – staff

Staff Approach and Communication Strategies

- rely on common sense
- identifying who needs help – making judgements – sometimes difficult – customers unaware

What Might Help Improve V/Line’s Communication Accessibility?

- changes to infrastructure such as signage;
- changes to operations such as more consistent use of the same platforms for a destination;
- improvement to staff communication skills;
Key Findings – staff

- Development and introduction across the system of communication aids;
- Community education that would better equip customers and the public to be more proactive in asking for help and/or providing help; and
- Various identification or locational strategies to help identify customers who may need help.
- Staff rated more highly ideas about changes to infrastructure, use of touchscreens, and use of iPad or smartphone apps compared to use of question or photo cards.
- Reflected the views of staff in the focus groups that were reluctant to think about carrying extra printed materials with them on the train or platform.
Conclusions

- V/Line has not taken advantage of some of the increasingly available and effective high and low tech aids for communication.

- Everyone’s responsible to ask for or offer help including public

- More knowledge needed about type of help and from whom
Recommendations

Develop and trial a variety of communication tools

- Tailored to system, images of destinations, pictorial or diagrammatic representation of routes, and multi-modal batteries of commonly asked questions and answers.
Recommendations

- Different formats, electronic and hard copy for use by staff as well as downloadable tools that might be used by customers to prepare for their journey.

- Develop outreach education programs to better equip the general public to provide assistance and communicate with people with communication difficulties.
- Develop targeted outreach education program for disability services.

- Regular foundation and refresher training programs in communication skills for front line staff,
  - tailored to each of the V/Line front line occupational groups and include training about the diversity of people with communication difficulties, and approaches to communication.
• Revise signage across the system simpler and clearer, and particular attention is given to signage about train destinations both on platforms and inside trains.

• Produce printed and online information in multiple formats, and develop Easy English versions of key documents.
Contact details

For copies of the full report

http://hdl.handle.net/1959.9/214530

V/Line


For Easy English version


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