



Accessible Transport

Driving increased patronage and economic participation

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Accessible public transport enables more individuals to work and study, visit family and friends, and access critical services such as healthcare. Leading jurisdictions internationally are spearheading more inclusive, innovative, and collaborative approaches to **make public transportation more accessible and ensure individuals with a stake in the outcome are included in the design process**. For public transport providers and cities, accessible transport also increases the number of travellers and has a positive impact on the local economy.

In Australia, as we invest billions to grow and transform the transport network to respond to changing societal demands, **accessibility is front of mind** for transport agencies and governments alike. The federal government have undertaken a review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public transport, and the Albanese government have committed to the first update of these standards since they were first introduced 20 years ago. This will require a minimum standard, across all modes of transport - train, bus, ferry, tram and taxi - to ensure it is fit for purpose and meets the current needs of Australians.

The implementation of these **reforms will improve accessibility and support for independent travel**, meaning those with accessibility needs can plan and undertake their journey with higher confidence. However, the implementation will be both costly and complex for existing public transport and supporting infrastructure. In assessing the viability and implementation of these reforms, **public transport providers need to look beyond the cost and compliance with these reforms to the broader value it can deliver**.

Benefits beyond compliance

Our point of view is that accessibility is not just about compliance, or managing risk, but delivering a service to the members of our community who often need it most, while driving significant growth in patronage, and increasing economic participation.

Over 4.4 million Australians identify as having a disability, and most people will experience some form of disability during their life.¹ With our current transport network nationally, **one in six people aged 15 years** and over with a disability have expressed difficulty using public transport,² identifying the lack of transport accessibility as one of the barriers to their participation in the economy. Expanding this further, lack of transport connectivity has a disproportionate social and economic impact in rural communities.

By removing barriers to accessible transport, patronage will increase – the lack of consistent accessibility across today's network currently acts as an inhibitor for individuals, and removes their ability to participate within the network – if we reduce the inhibiting barriers for these individuals, this enables a larger portion of the population to engage with the network. **The social benefit of this is estimated to be more than double the cost of implementation,** even if only a subset of potential DSAPT accessibility reform is considered.

Despite this benefit, nationally, minimal uplift in the accessibility of Australia's network has been observed since the introduction of the 2002 reforms. The upfront investment required, coupled with the disperse geographical nature of the network, and competing government priorities continue to be barriers to change.





What are the anticipated flow on benefits of accessible transport?

Increased patronage numbers...

Public Transport providers Australia wide are seeking to increase patronage numbers and reduce the cost per journey. Accessibility can be a key driver for this growth, with more accessible networks encouraging greater network participation for all. Global railways have seen significant patronage growth by focusing on this opportunity, leveraging new technologies to tackle initial barriers to areas such as customer information. From a broader benefits perspective, this also results in less emissions, and reduced congestion.

Improved economic participation....

Accessible public transport provides greater connectivity to areas with employment opportunities, healthcare services and commercial centres. This particularly benefits individuals residing in suburbs or rural areas who may otherwise face challenges commuting to work. Assistance in transport is the number one requirement expressed by people with a disability – an accessible network would remove this need for many, and support individuals with disabilities or limited mobility to commute independently across multiple transport modes. From this, we can harness the talents of a wider pool of individuals, leading to increased innovation and economic contribution within the community.

...and enhanced tourism opportunities.

An accessible transport network is becoming increasingly important to tourist and visitors. It can unlock a city as a possible tourist location, and provide ease of access to key attractions. Globally, we have seen a significant uplift in accessibility in the lead up to major events. The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic games aim to leave a legacy of **“A more equal and accessible games”**.³ The transport network is a key enabler of this, particularly given the dispersed nature of the Games, which will be delivered across Southeast Queensland.

The International Paralympic Committee Accessibility Guide (IPC) establishes global standards which will need to be adhered to by Game organisers – creation of an accessible transport network in Queensland will be fundamental to enabling seamless mobility for athletes, officials, and spectators, supporting inclusive participation, and contributing to the overall reputation of Brisbane and Australia as it hosts the Games.

With the global spotlight on South East Queensland through this event, this provides a unique opportunity which should not be missed, to encourage investment from transport agencies and governments alike.



The key to success

With the benefits apparent, how can Australia be successful in creating an accessible public transport network?

While the case for change is clear, the answer is far from simple – to be successful in delivering an accessible transport network, it is critical to view accessibility through a strategic lens. Accessibility needs to be considered across the whole customer journey, assessing the different accessibility challenges faced at each stage of the journey. The current transport network has pockets which meet accessibility requirements; however, benefits will not be realised unless passengers are able to complete a full journey (planning through to destination), inclusive of multi-mode and disrupted journeys.

We believe policymakers and transport authorities can enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of Australia's public transport network by employing the following four step methodology to prioritise interventions effectively:

Step 1: Identifying Obstacles Throughout the Customer Journey

By understanding the pain points at each stage of the customer journey, you can remove the barriers to travel. Challenges such as the lack of accessible journey planning tools, absent audible announcements, and inadequate real-time updates are significant impediments to accessibility.

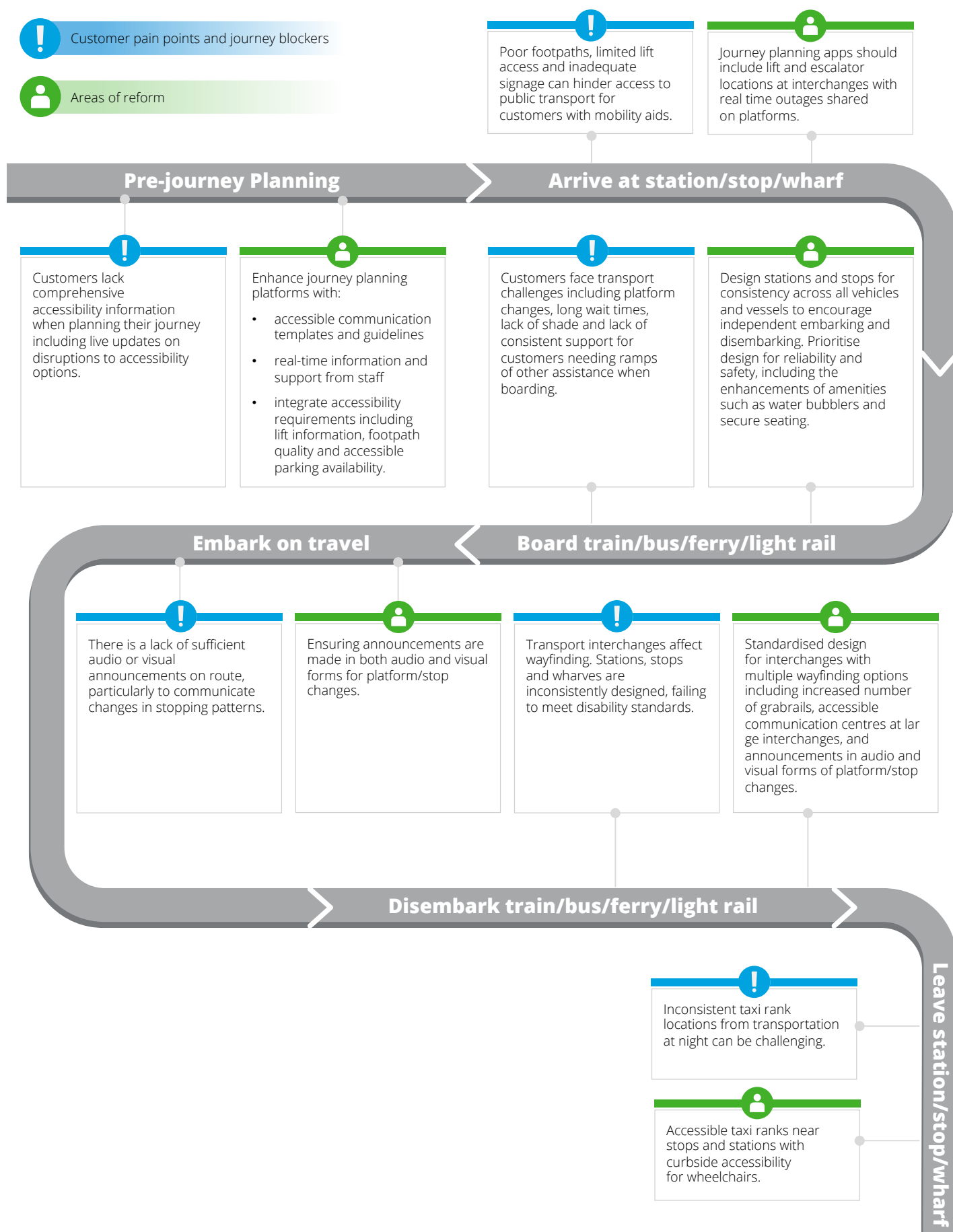
Step 2: Consolidating into Initiative Groups

Many reform areas and obstacles have commonalities, which will enable consolidation of initiatives into coherent groups. By aggregating challenges and identifying underlying patterns, policymakers and transport authorities can take a more holistic and practical consideration of where to invest to resolve accessibility issues.

Customer Journey Mapping

This journey map illustrates an example of customer point paints and journey blockers, and areas for reform.

For customers to complete their journey, each journey blocker needs to be removed for their accessibility challenge.

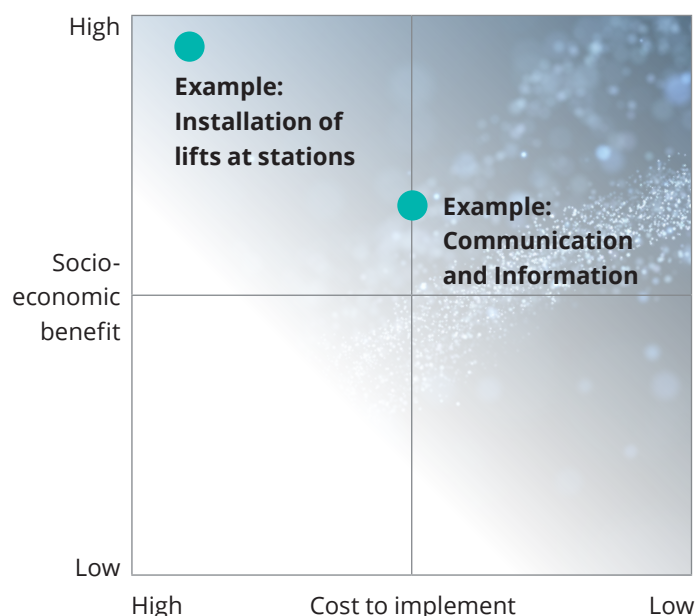


Step 3: Evaluating Initiatives by Cost-Benefit Analysis

Once the obstacles have been consolidating into initiative groups, they can be evaluated to understand their relative cost and benefit. In this context, costs considers the investment and operating costs associated with rectifying the accessibility challenges contained within each grouping. The benefit considers both the number of people who will benefit from the proposed initiative, and the scale of the benefit they will see. This ranges from hinderances that make the journey more challenging, to barriers that prevent the journey from being undertaken.

Given the scale of the ask, considering the obstacles through this lens can help prioritise which reform areas should be prioritised for investment.

Prioritisation of key initiatives to uplift the accessibility of Australia's public transport network



Step 4: Reviewing Assessed Initiatives Against Additional Considerations

These initiatives do not exist in isolation, and so it is important to review them with consideration of the broader context. This includes alignment with the broader strategy, integration with the impact and requirements of different business units (such as workforce implications), and how this can tie into the existing roadmap of asset and infrastructure renewals and upgrades. Initiatives that align with existing objectives and delivery plans will leverage existing resources and investment allocation, reducing the overall cost of implementing the reforms. For instance, any upgrades to real time communication and information should consider the capabilities of the existing technology within the organisation, and the pipeline for changes to elements such as websites, apps and other communication platforms.

The adoption of a strategic approach to accessibility, underpinned by integrated planning and meticulous evaluation, not only supports compliance but holds the promise of unlocking journeys, driving significant growth in patronage, increasing economic participation, and supporting future opportunities. By maximising socio-economic benefits while delivering initiatives in a cost-effective manner, policymakers and transport authorities can realise the vision of an inclusive and accessible public transport network for all stakeholders.

In conclusion

With a strong pipeline of transport investment across Australia, we need to change how we view the business cases that funds accessible transport initiatives, to include patronage targets and the benefit of increased economic participation as a key driver to delivering social impact that far outweighs the cost.



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Endnotes

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