



DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE

**BUS VANNIN
ACCESSIBILITY STEERING GROUP**

RECOMMENDATIONS



**Isle of Man
Government**
Reillys Ellan Vannin

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BACKGROUND

The following Motion was agreed at the April 2021 sitting of Tynwald:

"that the Department of Infrastructure should commit to adopting the United Kingdom Confederation of Passenger Transport Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the use and acceptance of mobility scooters on low floor buses adapted to carry wheelchairs in a way that is appropriate to the Isle of Man whilst recognising the policy approach of the Government to be in line with UK Equality Act related Codes of Practice and Guidance; and further is of the opinion that the Department should establish a steering group, to include disability and user representation, to inform adoption of the Code and other aspects of accessibility to bus services and that the Department should submit a report with recommendations to Tynwald no later than the October 2021 sitting of Tynwald Court."

CURRENT POSITION

Steering Group

In accordance with the Motion, the Bus Vannin Accessibility Steering Group ("BVASG") was established. Current membership of the Steering Group includes Mrs K Sharpe, MLC, political member of the Department, the Bus Vannin passenger representative and the appointment of two people with disabilities to represent a wide range of experiences and views of people with a disability, who were appointed using a clear and transparent process.

The revised Terms of Reference of the Group which reflect these appointments was approved on 18th February 2022 (Ministerial Decision 8-22) and will ensure that we are able to embrace the principle of participation motto used by people with disabilities "nothing about us without us". Two new members, Mr Stephen Underwood and Mrs Debs Cripps, have now joined BVASG to ensure that the recommendations put forward by the Steering Group are informed by people who are most likely impacted by the changes.

In order to assist the Steering Group members to take account of other's experiences of using or trying to use Bus Vannin services, the Department is also considering the merits of establishing a broader group to act as a sounding board to which a wide range of individuals will be able to express their views to help inform the development of accessibility policy.

It has also been suggested that the remit of the Steering Group could be expanded to enable other Divisions to gain insight into accessibility issues regarding their services.

Report to Tynwald

Unfortunately it was not possible to produce and authorise a report to Tynwald as required by the Motion within the necessary timescales to meet the October 2021 sitting. Instead, former Minister Crookall, updated Tynwald Members on its progress. A copy of the Hansard extract is attached for information at Appendix 1. A copy of the follow-up letter to Tynwald Members from former Minister Crookall, is attached at Appendix 2.

It is proposed that a report to Tynwald, outlining progress to date and based upon the contents of this report, be submitted to the November 2022 sitting of Tynwald.

Public Engagement

To identify the barriers in using Bus Vannin services faced by people with a disability, a 6 week public consultation took place during the period from 16th August 2021 to 29th September 2021. A total of 246 responses to the consultation were received, of which 134 were from people with a disability.

By far the most significant barrier in accessing or travelling by bus was identified as being linked to the walkway, with poor pavements and uneven surfaces closely followed by obstacles on the walkway.

For the 42 respondents who confirmed that they are wheelchair/mobility scooter users, the mobility space on the bus being occupied by another mobility aid or pram was a more significant barrier than the inability to carry a mobility aid. Of those responding on behalf of someone with a disability, 26 reported that the ability to carry a mobility aid was a barrier for the people they were responding on behalf of. It should be noted that it was not clear whether those 26 responses were about the 12 respondents who use a mobility aid who reported this barrier, or different individuals, and most likely a combination of both.

A workshop for mobility scooter and wheelchair users took place at the Comis Hotel, on 14th October 2021. The workshop was facilitated by Department officers together with Mrs Claire Christian MHK (the former Chair of BVASG) and Mrs Jane Poole-Wilson MHK (as the Equality Champion). The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the barriers to using Bus Vannin, and the Confederation of Passenger Transport "CPT" Code. A copy of the themes identified at the Workshop is attached at Appendix 3.

Acceptance of Mobility Scooters on Bus Vannin Services

The acceptance of mobility scooters on Bus Vannin services has to date been limited by two specific factors:

- the ability to restrain the scooter, particularly on the high speed inter-urban sections of Bus Vannin routes and;
- the number of accessible bus stops.

The future acceptance of mobility scooters on Bus Vannin requires that these factors are addressed.

Ability to restrain electric mobility scooters

The service operator, Bus Vannin has advised that the inability to secure the mobility scooter and restrain the passenger would put passengers at risk, particularly on its high speed inter-urban operation

Bus Vannin buses are constructed to UNECE Regulation 107 Standards, which applies to all buses registered in Europe; the carriage and restraint of mobility scooters is not included within these standards, and the UNECE is awaiting an agreed standard of fixing on a mobility scooter that can be incorporated into the design in future.

The CPT Code, which has been adopted by a number of the big public transport companies (but not always adopted by their subsidiaries operating inter-urban buses, eg Yorkshire Coast Liner from Leeds to the coastal resorts), addresses the issue of restraint by requiring that the mobility scooter travel backwards in the wheelchair space, with the headrest providing the restraint. The secretariat is unaware of any evidence that adoption of the CPT Code has had any impact in relation to the UNECE Regulations for the UK operators that have adopted the CPT Code.

In relation to speed, Bus Vannin has advised that a number of routes to Ramsey, Peel and the south are operating with a 50 mph speed limit, and Bus Vannin has recorded head-on accidents with a closing speed (the combined speed of vehicles colliding in a head-on collision), in excess of 80 mph. Given the much greater distance to the other towns in comparison with journeys around Douglas and Onchan, Bus Vannin provides a high speed inter-urban operation when servicing the Island's towns and villages outside Douglas.

Accessibility

The second concern relates to the accessibility of bus stops. A programme of works undertaken in the UK has ensured that all bus stops have been accessible since the 1980s, with the level of boarding set at a height above road surface (180mm), which allows level boarding. Unfortunately, there has only been a very limited programme of works undertaken in the Isle of Man to make bus stops accessible. With over 900 bus stops on the Island, approximately 80 bus stops have had remedial work undertaken to improve accessibility.

In addition to level boarding, other features of the bus stop are required in order to ensure wheelchair accessibility. As a minimum, these include sufficient width of the footway (minimum 2m, ideally 2.7m) to provide space for the ramp to be dropped; the provision of footway surfacing; absence of pavement obstructions, and dropped kerbs.

To determine the level of accessibility of each stop, an audit is required, following which a targeted remedial programme can be identified. Whilst a number of stops have been made accessible in response to individual requests, the priority of the work undertaken to date has been to stops that have been made accessible as part of the highways maintenance programme, and the Southern route, which carries 50% of Bus Vannin passengers. Given the lack of available information regarding where people with disability issues live and where they want to travel, the decision to prioritise accessibility on the Southern route was due to the assumption of providing benefit to a greater number of passengers on the most used routes.

Remedial Work

The issue of bus stop accessibility was considered by the Highways Minor Improvements Committee, the politically-lead group for the assessment and prioritisation of minor road, footway, crossing, traffic and parking improvement schemes, at its meeting on 26th November 2021. At that meeting it was agreed that £150,000 be allocated from the 2022/2023 budget to undertake accessibility improvement works. It is estimated that the basic remediation work required for each stop would be in the region of £10,000; this would enable remedial works to be undertaken on approximately 15 bus stops. Ancillary work eg installation of a bus shelter, lighting etc., would obviously increase this cost.

The priority list of stops with proposals for accessibility, is currently under review between with Bus Vannin and Highway Services.

OTHER ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

Other Bus Users: Wheelchairs and Prams

The space potentially occupied by a mobility scooter, is also used by wheelchairs. With only one wheelchair space on a bus, a mobility scooter user would be unable to travel should a wheelchair or mobility scooter user already be occupying the space on the bus. The same would apply to a wheelchair user if a mobility scooter or another wheelchair user was already occupying the space on the bus. There is anecdotally only a small number of wheelchair users who currently use the bus, and therefore a limited chance currently that the wheelchair space will already be occupied by another user in a wheelchair. However, with no real evidence regarding the number of potential passengers with a disability who are not using the service due to the barriers for them to using the service, it is difficult to quantify the impact on the service of additional journeys by people with disabilities once those barriers have been removed.

By far the greater use currently being made of the wheelchair space is the carriage of pushchairs and prams, and shopping trolleys, which can travel in this space without the need to collapse the pushchair and remove shopping from the shopping compartment, etc. Some Bus Vannin services regularly carry a number of pushchairs (anecdotally up to 4), at any one time.

Under UK case law, a passenger with a child in a pram travelling in a wheelchair space cannot be instructed to fold the pram to facilitate use of the space by a wheelchair, only requested, to do so. The space is used on a first come, first served basis.

The updated accessibility rules in the UK from 2023 will require a pram space in addition to wheelchair space. Bus Vannin has applied this standard since 2011 because of the number of prams carried.

The updated UK accessibility amendments do not include provision for mobility scooters, reflecting the UNECE position.

Other Bus Users: Other Disabilities

As reported to the House of Keys in March 2022, the Department does not hold information on the number of mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs used by people who live on the Island or used by visitors each year. A recent discussion (August 2022) with the Island's longest established mobility aid company, Kissack Care Limited, estimated a total number in the region of between 130 – 200 mobility scooters on the Island. Whilst this number includes Class 3 mobility scooters, their most popular model sold is a Class 2 scooter.

The Isle of Man Health & Lifestyle survey 2019 reported that three quarters (75.9%) of adults had no problems with their mobility, whilst 3.2% of adults were unable to walk or had severe mobility problems. This data would suggest that 25% of the adult population of the Isle of Man have problems with mobility.

The 2021 Isle of Man Census Report Part 1 reports that 10,038 residents state that they have been professionally diagnosed with a long-term physical or mental condition or

disability that limits their day to day activities to some extent. This represents 11.9% of the population. The current configuration of Bus Vannin vehicles is designed to accommodate a number of different accessibility issues, including level access (ie no step) for passengers, additional leg room, and space under seating for assistance dogs.

The above data confirms that there are a significant number of people on the Isle of Man with a disability, and it could be suggested that the Steering Group could assist more people by focussing on the broader accessibility issues and needs.

Isle of Man Code for the Acceptance of Mobility Scooters on Bus Vannin Services

The UK CPT Code for the Acceptance of Mobility Scooters on Bus Vannin services has been raised in both Tynwald and the House of Keys on a number of occasions in recent years. To date, the carriage of mobility scooters has been rejected by the Department due to the inability to restrain them in Bus Vannin vehicles, and the accessibility of bus stops outlined above.

The Motion agreed at the April 2021 sitting of Tynwald committed the Department to accept the carriage of mobility scooters in a way that is appropriate to the Isle of Man. Work has therefore been progressed to identify a suitable way forward, whilst addressing the issues outlined in this report.

A draft copy of the proposed Code for the acceptance of mobility scooters on Bus Vannin services is attached at Appendix 4. Once approval to progress has been determined, this would be expanded to include a precise definition of a mobility scooter; how to determine scooter size, and the Code would be made available in various formats, including large print, as requested at the Wheelchair and Mobility Scooter workshop in October 2021.

It is interesting to note that since the development of the Code in 2011, a number of Operators now no longer follow the original CPT guidance, and instead have moved to stipulating their own parameters for travel. An example of this approach is Metrobus, <https://www.metrobus.co.uk/wheelchair-and-mobility-scooter-users>.

This approach could be more appropriate for the Isle of Man, with the publication of guidance on the Bus Vannin website.

It is important to note that engagement with the bus driver Unions and staff will be an essential part of the process to enable the carriage of mobility scooters on Bus Vannin services. There will also be a need to provide appropriate 'train the trainer' training and generic disability awareness training for bus drivers, for which there will be a resource and financial cost.

OPTIONS:

Option 1: Permit the Acceptance of Mobility Scooters on all Bus Vannin Routes

The Department could instruct Bus Vannin to accept mobility scooters on all Bus Vannin routes.

Advantages

- Meets the requirements of the April 2021 Tynwald Motion.

- Would enable suitable Class 2 mobility scooter users to travel on all Island Bus Vannin services.

Risks

- No mitigation for restraint and speed risks that have been identified.
- Does not identify nor address any of the accessibility safety risks identified.

Option 2: a Trial Approach for the Carriage of Mobility Scooters on Bus Vannin

A trial approach to adoption of an Isle of Man Code on a slower urban route would enable the issues of speed and restraint to be addressed. A trial of the carriage of mobility scooters initially on the number 21 route which operates between Douglas, the Business Park, Anagh Coar and Farmhill via Pulrose, would enable residents to travel on their mobility scooters from their homes into central Douglas and to access business and services at the Business Park (although the addition of a dropped kerb would be required to cross the road from the bus stop to the offices at the Business Park). The trial would take advantage of those bus stops already made accessible along the southern route, and attendees at the mobility scooter and wheelchair stakeholder workshop held in October 2021, agreed to a phased approach.

An audit of the stops (approximately 60), along the No 21 route has already been undertaken. A number of bus stops have been identified which meet the safety requirements identified regarding the ability to board the bus due to kerb height and the angle of the ramp once dropped; sufficient width of the footway to provide space for the ramp to be dropped; the provision of footway surfacing; absence of pavement obstructions, and dropped kerbs.

A revision of the traffic arrangements in Victoria Street (which includes the bus stop), is scheduled for September/October 2022.

Each of the stops along the route could be graded according to the level of accessibility, and a detailed map prepared and published, along the lines of Transport for London's "Step Free Guide", attached at Appendix 5. <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/step-free-tube-guide-map.pdf>

This would enable Bus Vannin to identify the stops which are safe for passengers to board and alight the bus on their mobility scooter, and enable passengers with other mobility issues to determine for themselves those stops that meet their accessibility needs. This would be in line with suggestions made by the former political members of the Accessibility Committee, who proposed that in order to start somewhere, a map showing the locations of the accessible bus stops should be made publicly available.

This option could also be supported by a programme of remedial works that would prioritise those stops that are used by the most passengers.

Unfortunately, the accessible stops along the No 21 route will not necessarily take people where they want to go; there are a number of accessible bus stops along Peel Road, and in Pulrose, one accessible stop in Farmhill at Braddan School, but no accessible stops in Anagh Coar. The only accessible stop currently in the centre of Douglas is Victoria Street, which will be improved following the planned remedial work in July 2022. Whilst the stop at the Business Park is accessible, there is currently no dropped kerb in place to enable a person to

cross the road to the offices of Zurich etc. Key stops on the Number 21 route could be identified and considered in conjunction with passenger numbers, to identify a number of key stops that could be made accessible with minimum remedial work. Key locations such as Anagh Coar, may require more substantial remediation.

Should no significant issues be identified on the No 21 route, after 6 months the trial could be extended to the Numbers 22 and 25 routes to Upper Douglas, Willaston and Onchan. This extension of the trial would also be accompanied with regular monitoring.

It is anticipated that as the carriage of mobility scooters is extended to other service areas, there will be an increase in usage. This progression will assist in obtaining a better understanding of the hidden demand for the carriage of mobility scooters; ie the number of passengers who do not currently travel by bus as they are unable to do so, but who would if the service permitted the carriage of mobility scooters; and the impact this may have on service provision and other passengers.

Advantages

- Meets the requirements of the April 2021 Tynwald Motion, by starting the process to accept mobility scooters on Bus Vannin services.
- Mitigates the restraint issues that have been identified.
- A one year trial, based upon a pre-determined methodology to measure results, would enable the collection of data regarding usage and customer feedback, for consideration by the Accessibility Steering Group. A draft set of objectives for the trial, is attached at Appendix 6.
- Starting the trial would enable the Department to provide a positive report to Tynwald that it is progressing the Motion agreed in April 2021.

Risks

- Mobility Scooter passengers would only be able to access and exit the bus at a limited number of stops along the route, which initially at least, may not be the journeys they wish to undertake.
- There would be a risk that passengers could be required to travel beyond their required destination.
- The trial would not test a high-speed, inter-urban route with rural stops.

Option 3: Undertake a Trial on the No 21 Route when all stops have been made accessible.

This would essentially be the same approach as identified in Option 2 but the implementation of the trial would only commence once all stops have been made accessible.

Advantages

- Mitigates the speed and restraint issues identified.
- Mobility Scooter passengers and the operators can be confident that mobility scooter users can get on, and off, the bus safely.
- Mobility Scooter passengers can be assured of being able to get on and off the bus at their chosen bus stop.

Risks

- With approximately 60 stops along the route, and a (possible) budget allocation of £150,000 per annum, completion of the remediation work required to make every stop accessible would take approximately 4 years, assuming a continued budget allocation at the same level, and appropriation of the entirety of the budget to the No 21 bus route.
- Failure to meet the requirements of the Motion in a politically acceptable timeframe, and the associated ramifications of such failure.

Option 4: Reject the carriage of Mobility Scooters on Bus Vannin Services due to safety concerns

This option would continue with the current practice of not allowing the carriage of any mobility scooters on any Bus Vannin services.

Advantages

- Removes the identified risks of speed and restraint of mobility scooters.
- Removes the risks associated with getting on and off the bus safely.
- Removes the need for an express or risk of implied professional indemnity for the Department's designated Transport Manager.

Risks

- Fails to meet the requirements of the 2021 Tynwald Motion.
- Potential for a further claim to the Employment & Equality Tribunal, for failing to make reasonable adjustments.
- Further parliamentary criticism and negative publicity for failure to meet the requirements of the Tynwald Motion.

Option 5: Explore the introduction of a "Dial a Ride" Service for Mobility Scooters using a DOI minibus

Also known as "paratransit", this service would operate in a way similar to the "Connect Villages" service, whereby people with a disability wishing to travel by bus but who are unable to do so, are able to book travel using a minibus. This could be on either a door to door basis, or bus stop to bus stop service. Dial-a-Ride services are provided by other transport organisations and areas, including Transport for London <https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/dial-a-ride/>, Southend on Sea, <https://www.southend.gov.uk/travel-information/dial-ride> and in the USA, where paratransit services are provided as part of efforts to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, eg. http://www.ridetransport.com/img/site_specific/uploads/DARUsersGuide.pdf.

Introduction of this model would require adequate availability of minibuses, and the ability to restrain the mobility scooter. It is understood that, like the big buses, there are a number of challenges involved in restraining the mobility scooter, but this is done on patient transfer services successfully.

Any decision to progress this option would require exploration and discussion with future users. A view expressed at the workshop for mobility scooter and wheelchair users at the

Comis Hotel on 14th October 2021, was that a good day was when the gentleman who expressed it was not reminded that he is disabled. Having a separate service for people with a disabilities, would most certainly be a reminder of disability. Such a service would however provide a speedier, more achievable option to deliver transport services to people with a disability.

Option 6: Explore a form of “Mobility as a Service”, whereby the Department purchases or works with a service provider eg. Circa to provide a number of mobility scooters which are made available for hire by users.

To remove the need for Bus Vannin to carry mobility scooter users, the Department could explore the purchase/rental of a number of scooters which could be hired to travel around the Island’s towns. This could work in a similar way to “Boris Bikes”. Mobility scooter users could then leave their scooters at the departing bus stop, and have the hire scooter available at the destination bus stop. Again, this option would require exploration and discussion with future users.

CONCLUSION

The April 2021 Tynwald Motion committed the Department to accepting mobility scooters on Bus Vannin, in a way that is appropriate to the Isle of Man. A trial with clear criteria, which identified and monitored the impacts, benefits and risks to service users, Bus Vannin and other key stakeholder, would meet the requirements of the Tynwald Motion, and enable the Department to clearly identify what is appropriate for the Isle of Man.

RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore recommended that:

- 1) Bus Vannin begin a 12 month trial carrying mobility scooters on its services;
- 2) an operational working group is established to identify the actions required to begin the trial;
- 3) the trial be monitored regularly, in order to address any issues identified;
- 4) the trial begin initially on the No 21 route, and extended to the Numbers 22 and 25 routes after 6 months should no significant issues be identified on the No 21 route;
- 5) a full review of the trial to be undertaken after 12 months, with full consideration given to how the carriage of mobility scooters could be extended Island-wide;
- 6) a report to Tynwald, based on the contents of this Report, be prepared and submitted to Cabinet Office for consideration by Council of Ministers prior to onward submission to the Clerk of Tynwald’s Office;
- 7) the remit of the Steering Group be extended to other areas of the Department, and;
- 8) Accessibility form one of the themes of the forthcoming Transport Strategy.

NEXT STEPS

Should the above recommendations be approved, an operational working group would be established to develop and deliver a full implementation plan. This would include engagement with the Unions, driver training, the scooter assessment process and travel card, production of route maps and publicity and identification of the process for monitoring and collating feedback.

The trial would be monitored on a regular basis to enable any identified issues to be addressed. The aim would be for the trial to be extended after 6 months to the two other circular urban bus routes, Numbers 22 and 25 to Upper Douglas, Willaston and Onchan.

As the current Bus Vannin operation has inter-urban sections on its other routes, expansion of the service beyond the No 21, 22 and 25 routes would require either further consideration of the risks and benefits associated with inter-urban journeys, or changes to the operational network model. Such change could involve the provision of more “hopper buses” for the Island’s town centres. Further consideration of how these issues could be addressed should begin 9 months into the trial.

Suggested Timescales

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|------------|---|
| 1 Sep 22 | First meeting of operational working group, identification of key steps, creation of detailed implementation plan |
| Sep 22 | Review of operational implementation plan by BVASG |
| Sep 22 | Engagement with Bus Vannin employee Union representatives |
| Nov 22 | Consideration of Report by Tynwald |
| Oct –Feb | Bus Driver Training |
| April 2023 | Carriage of Mobility Scooter Trial launch. |
| Sep 23 | Extension of trial to routes 22 and 25 |
| Dec 23 | Consideration of extension of service beyond existing routes |
| March 24 | Full trial review |
| June 24 | Review report |