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FORWARD

Merseylink is committed to ensuring that the services we provide are accessible to, and include people with disabilities, and that the community should have equal access to our services, information and employment opportunities.

Merseylink acknowledges that people with disabilities form a significant part of the community and as such must remain an ongoing focus of our service and its development.

The development of this Disability Action Plan is an important step in Merseylink’s ongoing commitment to changing attitudes which may discriminate against persons with a disability. It aims to help our company remove barriers which may limit persons with a disability participating in our community, accessing services, and having meaningful access to employment opportunities.

OVERVIEW OF MERSEYLINK

Merseylink commenced operations on 7th February 2000. The company operates a fleet of 80 buses, including 10 low floor buses throughout Devonport, Ulverstone, Port Sorell, Spreyton, Sheffield and Latrobe, Monday to Saturday.

Merseylink is responsible for an extensive regional transport service and a network of school bus routes. Merseylink helps residents and visitors alike enjoy the convenience of the region’s best bus service.

Merseylink also offers a wide range of charter bus services for state wide travel. We work extensively with our local schools, community groups, clubs to provide cost effective local and state wide travel.
How to get a copy of this Disability Action Plan

Copies of this Disability Action Plan are available at the Merseylink Office, located at:

283 Port Sorell Rd, Wesley Vale, Tasmania.

Copies of this Disability Action Plan are available for download from the website at www.merseylink.com.au

Electronic copies of this Disability Action Plan are available in electronic format upon request by phoning 03 6427 7626 or by emailing info@merseylink.com.au

Accessible Public Transport in Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government’s Disability Framework for Action (2013-2017) outlines its commitment to increasing accessible transport options:

- sets out the Government's vision for Tasmania as an inclusive and caring community
  applies to all Tasmanian Government agencies
- provides a direction for action by Government
- enables people with disability, their families and carers to work in partnership with the Government
- promotes leadership across all State Government agencies to institute a 'whole-of-government' approach to policy and planning, service delivery and evaluation
- includes a performance monitoring framework

This document can be viewed here http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/CSR/policy/Policy_Work/disability_framework_for_action

The development of this updated Disability Action Plan is aimed at supporting this process and Merseylink will undertake to meet the requirements of the Disability Action Plan with the assistance of DSG and local Councils. There will be instances where Merseylink has little control over the outcome due to not being the responsible agency, e.g. Council, Civil works etc.
**Merseylink’s Disability Action Plan**

This Disability Action Plan is the basis for Merseylink’s process of identifying and addressing disability accessibility issues across the company in line with the relevant legislation. This Disability Action Plan aims to reduce the barriers to people with a disability utilising our services or gaining employment within our organisation firstly by identifying the barriers, then by outlining the remedial action required.

By taking a companywide approach to accessibility it is envisaged that Merseylink will promote the inclusion and participation of people with a disability in the community and facilitate change in practices which discriminate against people with a disability.

Merseylink’s Disability Action Plan is designed to ensure that practices are proactive in meeting the needs of people with disabilities, carers and associates, and that Merseylink’s services and facilities will be accessible to all.

**Objectives of this Disability Plan**

The objectives of Merseylink’s Disability Plan are to support our commitment to ensuring that the services we provide are accessible to, and include people with disabilities, and that the community should have equal access to our services, programs, information and employment opportunities.

Specific objectives of the Disability Action Plan:

- company recognition that people with disabilities are a significant part of the community
- companywide commitment to meeting the transport needs of people with a disability
- to provide a platform for the ongoing process of providing improved accessibility across our services
- to promote employment opportunities within our organisation for people with a disability
- to meet our legislative requirements
This plan will support Merseylink for the future in a proactive way, to ensure that the needs of people with a disability are considered and addressed in all planning, services and operations.

Legislation

Merseylink has responsibilities under both Federal and State anti-discrimination legislation in relation to access for people with disabilities.

- Discrimination is defined as treating people with a disability less favourably than people without the disability would be treated under the same circumstances (direct discrimination);
- Discrimination also exists where there is a condition or requirement imposed which may be the same for everyone, but which unfairly, excludes or disadvantages people with a disability (indirect discrimination);
- It is also unlawful to discriminate against a person because their associates (family, carers, partners etc) have a disability; and
- Different treatment of people with a disability is not unlawful discrimination where it is reasonably intended to ensure that they have equal opportunities or to meet their specific needs.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)

Merseylink has a responsibility under the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), to provide equitable, dignified access to goods, services and premises used by the public. These are broadly defined and would include all aspects of the organisation.

The DDA provides uniform protection against unfair and unfavourable treatment for people with a disability in Australia. It also makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person who is an ‘associate’ e.g. a friend, carer or family member. The DDA provides a broad definition of people with a disability which means that everyone with a disability is protected. The DDA supports the principle
that people with a disability have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community. Provisions apply to a wide range of life activities including:

- access to premises used by the public;
- education;
- provision of goods and services;
- employment; and
- administration of Commonwealth laws and programs.

The DDA requires that appropriate changes be made to provide access. Where this does not occur, a person can take legal action through the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) or the Federal Court.

**Tasmanian Anti - Discrimination Act 1998 (TADA)**

Merseylink has responsibility under the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (TADA). The Act applies to discrimination and prohibited conduct by, or against a person engaged in, or undertaking, any activity in connection with the following:

- employment;
- education and training;
- provision of facilities, goods and services;
- accommodation;
- membership and activities of clubs;
- administration of any law of the State or any State program; and
- awards, enterprise agreements or industrial agreements.
Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT)

Merseylink also has responsibilities under the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT). These Standards have been made under the provisions of the DDA and establish minimum accessibility requirements to be met by providers and operators of public transport conveyances, infrastructure, premises and services. The Standards take into account the range of disability covered by the DDA.

Accessibility Focus Areas at Merseylink

As an outcome of the Company’s Accessibility review, issues were identified in the following areas:

1. Physical access to buses and bus service infrastructure
2. Communication and up to date information flow
3. Customer care
4. Ongoing accessibility compliance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Access Services</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of stops that are DDA compliant</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of Merseylink Route services delivered by DDA compliant buses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fleet Accessible %</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Trips %</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outcomes

Merseylink has undertaken a thorough internal review in relation to establishing this Disability Plan. The company recognises it has significant responsibilities under the relative legislation and is committed to a more extensive review incorporating external consultation with the community and government. The company considers this Disability Action Plan a starting point that with ongoing evaluations and updates through internal and external reviews will ensure that Merseylink achieves the required compliance levels for accessibility.

The following section outlines issues which have been raised for action.

DAP Action Items

1. DDA Compliant Bus Services

   Disability Standards for Public Transport require 55% of services to comply by 2012. By 2017 90% of services must comply. By 2022 100% of services must comply.

   Merseylink currently exceeds 2017 compliance requirements and has already met compliance for 2022

2. Bus Upgrades

   Merseylink recognises that scope exists to improve accessibility to existing buses, including compliant low floor buses, through updated signage and disability designation incorporating international accessibility symbols.

   Currently all our DDA compliant low floor buses have the international accessibility symbol on the front window
3. **Bus Interchange**  
Current Devonport Bus Interchange inadequate in terms of signage, time table information and overall access issues. Only 1 out of 4 stops used are currently DDA compliant. Ongoing discussions are taking place with Industrial Designer for the design, production and installation of a new Interchange which will address accessibility requirements. Discussions with local government and DSG also required for approval.

4. **DDA Compliant Bus Route Information**  
Historically, only limited information on bus route accessibility has been available.

We are currently working on a real time data stream for our website to provide passengers with live information about the accessibility of the buses on all routes.

5. **Accessibility Information availability through Customer Service and Driving Staff**  
Increased disability awareness is required across the board including and not limited to customer service.

In line with the update of the website, bus route timetables and Anti-Discrimination Policy a review and update of access and awareness training will be undertaken to address and promote the DAP to all customer service and company staff to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and ready and willing to support people with disabilities. Greater awareness will be emphasised across the board on customer service with all staff clearly understanding the information, materials and processes available to assist people with additional needs.
6. Equal Opportunity Employment
Merseylink is an Equal Opportunity Employer with a clear understanding of Equal Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination laws. Merseylink has a proud record in this regard having won the Tasmanian and Victorian 2011 CRS Employer of the Year and being nominated for the National Award.

We are committed to building on this record by ensuring that our recruitment policies ensure employment opportunities are available for people with a disability and that all staff with disabilities are well supported and accommodated.

7. Disability Action Plan Review and Update
The actions outlined in this Disability Action Plan are an ongoing and evolving process. Significant consultation will be required with external stakeholders, including consultation with people with a disability, AHRC, local Government and DSG to review and monitor this Disability Action Plan on an ongoing basis so that Merseylink meets and maintains future legislative requirements.

Disclaimer
Whilst the utmost care has been taken in the preparation of this Disability Action Plan, the legal issues surrounding anti-discrimination law are continually changing. This change occurs in relation to Australian Standards and Building Codes and consideration should be given to these and other relevant Standards. Action taken by a public authority, organisation or individual in reliance on this Disability Action Plan remains the responsibility of that public authority, organisation or individual.