



Press release

COST 349

Accessibility of Coaches and Long Distance Buses

Closing Seminar at “Busworld” in Kortrijk on 25 October 2005

A major European research Action (COST 349) has been examining ways to improve access for disabled people to coaches and long distance buses. This international collaborative project has considered the diverse needs of disabled people including those who wish to travel while remaining seated in their wheelchair; vehicle design; infrastructure design; information and training; economic implications.

Disabled people represent about 13% of the population in Europe. There are about 38 million disabled people in the European Union and 60 million across the continent as a whole. Over the next 30 years, there will be a significant increase in the older population and the number of people aged over 60 will double. Many of these people depend on coaches and long distance buses for both regular and recreational travel.

The COST 349 experts considered best practice for intercity services - including those organised by public transport authorities - as well as coach tours. The vehicles considered covered the full range from low floor easy access interurban buses to high specification touring coaches.

The findings of this research are being presented at a Seminar at “Busworld” in Kortrijk on Tuesday 25 October starting at 10.30. There will also be an opportunity to question a panel of those involved in the Project. The Seminar, which is free, will be followed by a buffet lunch to allow detailed discussion with those who took part in the Project. Joining instructions and a full Agenda will be sent out to delegates in September.

Those wishing to attend the Seminar should register on the following website

www.angelamccarthy.co.uk

Background

The analysis of the best practice in terms of vehicle architecture and design shows different solutions, such as low-floor interurban buses for short distance routes, high floor coaches, coaches with a low floor ahead of the front axle or double deck coaches with a low floor layout in the lower saloon. Low floor vehicles or those with step-free access to a wheelchair space can be fitted with a ramp. High floor coaches require a lift. The recommendations also concern handrails, lighting, seat spacing, designated wheelchair space and restraint system, communication, interior environment and materials, and audible and visual announcements.

But a vehicle with accessibility for all is not efficient if the boarding infrastructure is not adapted. For example in rural areas, a bus stop may only be a grass verge. The COST 349 recommendations include boarding area design and equipment, the facilities at stops, layout and facilities at terminals, including safety and comfort.

Information for disabled passengers must be accessible to all, and appropriate assistance from a trained member of transport staff may also be needed. The recommendations and best practice concern journey planning, interchange or transfers, vehicle identification, information in terminals, and training of transport staff to make the journey as easy as possible for disabled passengers.

There are economic implications for accessible vehicles, but there are also economic and social costs arising from a lack of accessibility. The report examines the financial case for making coaches and long distance buses fully accessible, and also considers a wide range of proposals designed to ease the introduction of accessible vehicles to the operating industry. Other costs, such as infrastructure, and for staff training, are taken into account.

COST means European **C**ooperation in the Field of **S**cientific and **T**echnical Research. 35 countries are members of COST, under the umbrella of the EU Framework Programme for Research.

COST 349 was launched at the end of 2001, with the theme: "Accessibility of coaches and long distance buses for people with reduced mobility". 15 countries participated, with experts from government, research institutes, disabled people's associations, transport operators, vehicle manufacturers and equipment suppliers.

Previous research includes COST 322 on best practice for low floor city buses, and COST 335 which promoted best practice for accessibility to heavy rail systems.

Additional Information

A CD-ROM is available with the reports from COST 349, COST 322 and COST 335.

Information on COST actions is available on the website www.cordis.lu/cost-transport/