



The European Older People's Platform
La Plate-forme européenne des Personnes âgées

CITIES FOR MOBILITY WORLD CONGRESS: STUTTGART

14-16th June 2009

WORKSHOP: How to provide mobility in an ageing society

A Contribution.

*By P.G.Rayner
FCILT FIRO MCIM Assoc IRSE
Vice President National Pensioners' Convention (NPC)
Member of AGE Expert Group on Universal Access and Independent Living*

AGE - the European Older People's Platform is a European network of organisations of people aged 50+ directly representing over 25 million older people in Europe. AGE aims to voice and promote the interests of the 150 million inhabitants aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most.

1. Introduction

Firstly as an older person I believe the increased life expectancy and improved health overall of older people is something we should celebrate, but as with all good things it brings with it some problems. There is no doubt we are the fastest growing sector of society and with many aspects of life this causes difficulties. Mobility is one of those problems and an important one. If older people accept there are increasing numbers of us we have to contribute more and for longer.

In many cities getting around is difficult enough for everyone, motorists, cyclists, pedestrians added to which public transport is often not suitable for

certain groups of people. The less mobile, by definition some older sections of society, need to be included but need help to gain that inclusion. Best practise from around the world, and there are many examples, would give us a number of solutions to what in some places are seen as insoluble problems.

All that is easy to say but economic conditions that prevail affect the solution. For example ideally an electric Tram or Light Rail is environmentally the right answer, but a cheaper bus alternative, which is less environmentally friendly, is often provided on account of cost.

Recognising that the North American/European issues, Indian, South American and Chinese dimensions we cover all pose different problems and perhaps call for different solutions. But I remind you to be **old is to be old** wherever you are.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Information Technology

“The internet is becoming the Town Square for the global village of tomorrow” so says Bill Gates founder of Microsoft. That may be true but the global village of tomorrow is a long way from the actual “Homeplace” of to-days older people. Many older people are disinterested and do not want to know anyway.

Of course the changing world being delivered by new technology offers significant opportunities for tackling the problems faced by older people. From home delivery for housebound older people through to potential improvements in transport information systems and to easier delivery of single access points for services for older people. But how do we persuade persons who are wary, for whatever reason, to accept/embrace modern technology and recognise these benefits?

Technology in ticketing is key and there will be a need to ensure the Free Pass does allow of universal access for only through such ease of movement can we provide mobility for older people.

Technology again in the provision of timetabling material and route planning, maps of Terminals and other facilities is also key and more and more will that be available via the inter net

This is important because seven in ten persons over 65 have never used the internet and the lack of access to the web is disadvantaging older people.

One of the difficulties is the lack of standardised equipment so it is more and more difficult for older people to understand the instructions and that is long before they understand the equipment itself. So to get older people into

transport systems or indeed into any assistive technology, that technology needs to be as “simple” as possible and as “standardised” as possible.

This is not something that suppliers of technology always welcome.

Most importantly we should not keep changing things. The world is full of clever people but my message is twofold

“ Let us learn to use to-days technology before inventing tomorrows.”

“The bigger the step forward the Innovator makes, the bigger the gulf between him/her and the user.”

2.2 Feeling Safe

The older one gets the more vulnerable one feels. So one of the biggest deterrents for older people and their inclusion in use of public transport is the lack of reassurance about their safety.

Large person that I am at age 75 no longer do I walk fearlessly down a lonely, badly lit corridor at night. I need to see staff on duty, closed circuit TV, good lighting, and frequent security/police presence. Importantly a good interchange between modes of travel, Bus to Train, Tram to Bus, Train to Taxi or private car pick up point is needed and are key factors for mobility. These are real issues for the older person.

2.3 Urban, Outer Suburban and Rural.

It has to be recognised that wherever older people live they all have a need to obtain Goods and Services, Doctors, Hospitals, Clinics and Care Homes and Day Centres if such exist. Most of these facilities are provided centrally.

It is not therefore just sufficient to provide free travel if the public transport services are not there in the first place. A free ticket but no service to use it on is not an unusual feature! Rural areas have sparse infrequent services and often older people have not the resources for car ownership and have increasing difficulties as a consequence.

Again best practise across the communities of the world may provide solutions. Community Mini Bus, Post Bus combining Mail and travel, Car sharing schemes, all are ways forward.

2.4 Value to Society as a Whole

The point needs to be made that the total community itself benefits from the issue of a Freedom Pass to all persons over 60 years of age to travel on public transport in their community. Not just the older person obtains benefit

because such mobility means older people continue to live in their own homes and participate in the local community.

The presence of older people in the town centres is good for local shops and businesses and their travel on off peak transport improves the marginal costs of those services.

The use of cars is a known pollutant and less car use is good for society. In addition there is a proven link between improved health and inclusion in the community which saves money.

Finally older people provide often unpaid well informed persons to contribute to committees and stakeholder groups. So free travel is not a burden on society and an uneconomic alternative but inclusion provides a vast untapped resource if governments recognised the benefits that accrue. Mobility is the key.

2.5 Be Realistic.

The Jumbo Jet, the Pendolino, the TGV or ICE train and many buses and coaches all have a 30year plus life. So if they are difficult of access now they will not be replaced to make the technology look good. In the short term it is unrealistic for older people to expect too much.

Therefore a key area is the adaption of assistive equipment, ramps, lifts, walkways, special toilets and doors, sensible adaptations to vehicles until life expiry rather than replacement with new equipment. This requires shared ideas and best practice once again to bridge the gap between the ideal and reality.

2.6 Security versus Access

There has always been a problem between the needs of Fire Services and Security Staff, one requiring easy evacuation and entry and the other not quite so keen. This has become an even bigger problem with the tightening of security world-wide. Security staff want access to be made difficult and older and indeed mobility impaired people in general want access made easier. This is a problem that needs specific resolution at each location for both high security and ease of access have a point to make.

3. Summary.

I have listed some of the problems, but hopefully they are point to some of the ways forward.

Of all the points to me the question of use of IT is the most important. More of us, and we are living longer, without IT it will not be possible to cope with

the care issues older people present and Transport and Mobility is only one example of many.

The need for simplicity and standardisation cannot be overstated in importance. If manufacturers can produce equipment economically they will do so because that is the business ethic.

But whilst AGE sounds these warnings and is concerned about these issues AGE is not foolishly resistant to change.

4. The contribution AGE can and does make

AGE is willing to be part of Stakeholder Groups or Expert Participation Groups and can call upon a variety of knowledgeable and experienced people. AGE believes also it is important to work alongside younger people to share opinions and views

It is important to be part of schemes that are moving the community forward. I personally favour the smaller groups of experts for analysis and research time frames and action plans can evolve.

Meaningful participation is important and for this reason AGE is involved in a number of projects AALIANCE , in OASIS , DREAMING and MEDIATE For more details on these projects please visit the AGE website (www.age-platform.org) or contact isabel.borges@age-platform.org)

Thank you very much for your attention

AGE- The European Older People's Platform
Rue Froissart 111
B-1040 Brussels Belgium
Tel: +32 2 280 14 70
Fax:+32 2 280 15 22
www.age-platform.org

END

**

*