

To: YB Dato' Dr Teng Hock Nan
Penang State Traffic Management Committee Chairman

From: NGOs In Penang Together With A Coalition Of 18 NGOs
Under The Barrier-free Environment And Accessible
Transport Group (BEAT) And Individuals

Subject: Memorandum Regarding Accessible Buses For Disabled
Persons

Date: May 19, 2007

This memorandum is prepared by Peter Tan

Introduction

Mobility is one of the most crucial factors in mainstreaming disabled persons into society. It contributes to their dignity and to their standard of living. It is linked to general environmental accessibility. There should not be discrimination against disabled persons in the provision of public transportation services, and there should be specific measures to enable them to move freely and access the workplace and other public places.

Generally, public transport in Malaysia, specifically buses, are not accessible to disabled persons using wheelchairs and do not have such facilities to make it convenient for blind persons and deaf persons to utilise this service conveniently.

This inaccessibility has marginalised disabled persons and those with mobility impairments. Disabled persons are unable to attend formal education in schools. Those who possess qualifications are unable to find gainful employment. They are unable to move around conveniently and therefore are not only deprived from benefiting from the progress of the nation but are also unable to contribute meaningfully to the country.

Without accessible public transport, performing basic but crucial routines that non-disabled persons take for granted are beyond the means of disabled persons. They will be unable to go to banks, post offices and government offices, and shop for groceries. The lack of an accessible public transport which is the most affordable option of mobility will affect disabled persons who are poor even more as they are unable to find alternative transport thereby marginalising them further.

The Issue

The Federal Government had allocated RM50 million for the purchase of 150 new buses by RapidPenang. This was good news to the people of Penang who had to endure the pathetic state of public transport in the island for many years now. The disabled community was even more pleased to hear that the buses would be “disabled friendly” as announced by Second Finance Minister Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop. Subsequently disabled persons in Penang and Malaysia were disappointed by news report that RapidPenang buses will not be accessible to wheelchair users and that boarding wheelchair users will delay the arrival schedule of the buses.

Disabled persons as citizens of Malaysia have the right to benefit from equal access to services and opportunities. Without accessible public transport, disabled persons have few opportunities to access other crucial services such as health care and education.

Even the Federal Government is concerned with this issue. On March 12, 2007, Minister of Transport Dato’ Seri Chan Kong Choy announced the formation of a high-level committee chaired by Deputy Secretary-General (Planning) Datuk Long See Wool. This committee will comprise of disabled persons, government agencies and major transport operators to ensure that the public transportation system in Malaysia is accessible to all.

As such, we the signatory of this memorandum call on the Penang State Government, Syarikat Prasarana Negara Berhad and RapidPenang to :-

- **Recognise** that disabled persons are consumers who have the right to the same services as others

- **Take immediate steps** to incorporate the needs of disabled persons in all planning and decision making
- **Ensure** that all buses are non-step buses to allow easy access to all persons
- **Work with** the local authorities to ensure that all bus stops be made accessible to benefit all persons
- **Consult and involve** disabled persons in all policies affecting them
- Make known the **Short Term** and **Long Term Action Plans** with specific time frames and goals (e.g. 5 Year Action Plan, 10 Year Action Plan) to achieve **100 % barrier free buses for all** within the set time frame

Below, we outline the essential points we want included to make public buses accessible to all:

Basic principles

- People require access to transport in all parts of Penang to participate in economical, educational, social, cultural, religious and political activities
- The vast majority of disabled persons live throughout the island and the mainland
- Public transport must be accessible to all, not only to people who can walk

Bus stations and bus stops

Accessibility:

- All bus stations and bus stops shall be accessible to all persons including disabled persons
- Walkways leading to bus stations and bus stops shall be accessible

Safety

- Pedestrian crossings shall be provided in the vicinity of bus stations and bus stops, and shall be accessible and appropriately indicated with signs
- Shelters shall be provided at all bus stops
- All bus stops shall have sufficient lighting to ensure safety for all commuters

Signage

- Signs shall be clear, visible and easily read by people with low vision and people with learning disabilities
- Bus timetables shall be provided in large print, and at a level to ensure that all people can read the information
- At bus stops used by buses for several routes, buses shall use fixed stops so that people, especially the visually impaired and those with wheelchairs, can queue in advance at the correct stop
- At large bus stops, approaching buses shall be announced by number and destination, both audibly and visually
- Changes and delays in bus arrival and departure times, including information of number and destination, shall be displayed by audio and visual means

Toilets

- Bus stations shall have accessible toilets

Buses

External signs

- Buses shall be prominently labeled with the international symbol of accessibility

Accessibility

- Buses shall be of the non-step type, with ramps to allow easy access
- Ramps shall be made of strong, durable material, and be designed to ensure their safe use for both manual and electric wheelchairs
- Ramps shall not be designed in ways that obstruct the casters (small front wheels)
- Ramps shall have a maximum gradient of no more than 1:12 to ensure safe and convenient access and exit for wheelchairs
- Doors shall be wide enough for manual and electric wheelchairs

Inside buses

- There shall be sufficient space inside buses to ensure full maneuverability of manual and electric wheelchairs
- There shall be sufficient space to park wheelchairs inside the bus
- Priority seats shall be clearly labeled

Safety

- There shall be a four-point strap-type tie-down to secure wheelchairs and a restraining system for wheelchair occupants

Communication

- Bells or buzzers shall be positioned at a level to enable their use by a person in a wheelchair

- Bells and buzzers shall be placed in the same position in all buses for the convenience of people with vision impairment
- Bells and buzzers shall be lit for people with hearing impairment
- Approaching bus stops shall always be announced clearly
- Approaching bus stops shall be visually displayed.

Driver responsibilities and training

- Drivers shall insist that people move to make space to allow people in wheelchairs to move into position and to secure wheelchairs
- Drivers shall not move the bus until they are assured that the wheelchair is secured
- Drivers shall ensure that people with vision impairment, pregnant women, the elderly, and others with special needs have the opportunity to be seated
- Buses shall carry first-aid kits
- Drivers shall be trained to use first aid kits
- Drivers shall be trained to provide appropriate assistance to people with visual impairments and physical impairments, or require assistance in other ways
- Proper training of drivers shall be provided with the involvement of disabled persons

This is by no means an exhaustive list. We not only want accessible buses but we also want such facilities to be safe. One point that we want to highlight is that accessible buses can be used by all, but non-accessible buses can only be used by a certain segment of society and deprive those with mobility impairments from using it.

There is no excuse not to make public transport that serves all persons. As Malaysia strives to be a developed nation by 2020, we inevitably have to ensure that our standard of living will be on par with, or better than, those currently enjoyed in developed nations.

RapidKL will be launching accessible bus service in June 1, 2007. There is no reason why RapidPenang cannot do the same. Whatever excuses to not include the needs of everyone in this new bus network is unacceptable and infringes on the rights of disabled persons to accessible public transport.

Fifty years after the Nation's independence, disabled persons still cannot move around freely not through the fault of their impairments but because policymakers do not have the foresight and sensitivity to make public amenities inclusive and accessible to all.

Conclusion

The needs of disabled persons such as ramps, suitable toilets and access to public transport should not be viewed as extra facilities requiring extra costs to construct. It is not a privilege to be given as and when the government deems necessary. Such basic amenities are the fundamental rights of disabled persons. It allows them equal opportunity to live life just like non-disabled citizens have the right to a safe and comfortable environment to live in.

Disabled persons must be included in mainstream society. We are the public. We are one of you. We are you. Nevertheless, we have been left far behind for the past fifty years. The government now has the opportunity, resources and knowledge to help bridge this gap. This opportunity must be made full use of to include the needs of everyone, including disabled persons. It is the

only the right thing to do. What is a few minutes delay in bus schedule to other passengers when disabled persons have waited patiently for fifty years for an accessible public transport system that they can use?

With this we trust we have explained clearly why an accessible public transport system is so crucial to disabled persons, especially wheelchair users. We also trust that you will do the right thing by ensuring that the 150 buses that will be put into service in Penang on August 1, 2007 are fully accessible for all.

This memorandum is endorsed by the following organisations and individuals as listed below:

1. Asia Community Service
2. Autistic Support Association of Penang (ASAP)
3. Citizens for Public Transport Penang (CEPAT)
4. Eden Handicapped Service Centre
5. Society of the Disabled Persons Penang (SDPP)
6. Spastic (Cerebral Palsy) Children's Association of Penang
7. St. Nicholas Home for the Blind
8. Women's Centre for Change (WCC)
9. Ex-Nicolite Association, Penang
10. Sustainable Independent Living and Access (SILA), Penang
11. Penangwatch
12. Bus Users Group (BUG)
13. SOS (Save Ourselves)
14. Citizens International
15. Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation

16. Persatuan Damai Orang-Orang Kurang Upaya Selangor & Wilayah Persekutuan
17. Beautiful Gate Foundation for The Disabled
18. Malaysian Spinal Injuries Association
19. Persatuan Mobiliti Selangor & Kuala Lumpur
20. Persatuan Orang-Orang Cacat Anggota Malaysia
21. Society of the Blind in Malaysia
22. Malaysian Association for the Blind
23. Society of the Chinese Disabled Persons Malaysia
24. Persatuan Kristian Shuang Fu untuk orang Kurang Upaya Kuala Lumpur
25. Persatuan Pemulihan Orang Cacat Selangor & Wilayah Persekutuan
26. Selangor Cheshire Home
27. Malaysian Information Network on Disabilities
28. Dignity & Services
29. United Voice (Self-Advocacy Society of Persons with Learning Disabilities Selangor & Kuala Lumpur)
30. Selangor Council for Welfare and Social Development
31. Majlis Paralimpik Malaysia
32. Lovely Disabled Home
33. Christine Lee Soon Kup
34. Naziaty Mohd. Yaacob
35. Peter Tan Hua Choon
36. Tan Kuan Aw
37. Loh Khang Cheow
38. Anne Lim
39. Derrick Cheah
40. Thomas Teh