

POLICY INFOCUS:

Inclusivity in Travel: PWD-Friendly Public Transportation

by Marie Abigail E. De Juan, Johnmela E. Dela Sada, Roi Louise R. Buenaventura, Mark William M. Dostilla, Sydney Kashmir A. Formentera, John Lloyd Paraiso

PROBLEM

The inadequacy of public transportation facilities represents a pervasive challenge that disproportionately affects vulnerable sectors, notably persons with disabilities (PWDs) and senior citizens. The existing infrastructure falls short of providing the necessary accommodations to make the transportation experience more navigable, easier, and convenient for these groups. For instance, 80 percent of train stations in Metro Manila are not fully accessible to PWDs (Ranada, 2023). This insufficiency manifests in a lack of ramps, elevators, designated seating, and other essential features that cater to PWDs and senior citizens' unique needs, hindering their ability to utilize public transportation independently and comfortably (National Economic Development Authority, n.d.).

Moreover, the absence of PWD and senior citizen-friendly facilities perpetuates their vulnerability by limiting their access to essential services, opportunities, and social engagements (Ting, 2019). For PWDs, the lack of proper infrastructure obstructs physical mobility and reinforces societal barriers, hindering their full participation in community life. Similarly, senior citizens, who may face mobility challenges, find their access to public transportation compromised, affecting their autonomy and overall quality of life.

Addressing the insufficiency of PWD and senior citizen-friendly facilities in public transportation is imperative to rectify the systemic inequalities and challenges these vulnerable sectors face. Enhancing accessibility is not merely a matter of physical convenience but a fundamental step toward fostering inclusivity and equal participation in societal activities (World Bank, 2015). By implementing infrastructure improvements that cater to the specific needs of PWDs and senior citizens, the public transportation system can instill a sense of trust and reliability among these groups. Providing ramps, elevators, priority seating, and other accommodating features facilitates their ease of travel and communicates a commitment to inclusivity and respect for diversity.

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Furthermore, an enhanced public transportation system that prioritizes accessibility for vulnerable sectors can have a positive cascading effect. Increased trust and convenience may convince PWDs, senior citizens, and the broader public to patronize such services, contributing to a more diverse and inclusive ridership. The resulting shift towards a transportation system that prioritizes the needs of all citizens promotes social equity and contributes to the overall well-being and cohesion of the community.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- **Retrofitting Inaccessible Facilities in Transit Hubs:** To address the issue of inadequate accessibility in public transportation facilities, a critical solution involves retrofitting existing transit hubs. This initiative would entail modifying infrastructure elements such as ramps, elevators, and walkways to comply with universal design principles, ensuring they are accessible to PWDs, senior citizens, and pregnant women. The retrofitting process aims to eliminate physical barriers, making transit hubs inclusive and navigable for all passengers. By prioritizing retrofitting, authorities can create an environment that fosters independence and facilitates seamless travel experiences for vulnerable groups.
- **Exclusive Staff Assistance for PWDs, Senior Citizens, and Pregnant Women in Transit Hubs:** To enhance the overall experience for PWDs, senior citizens, and pregnant women, a proactive solution involves providing exclusive staff assistance in transit hubs. Trained personnel would be dedicated to offering help, guidance, and support to individuals requiring special attention. This approach ensures that vulnerable passengers receive the necessary assistance and creates a supportive and empathetic environment within transit hubs. Staff assistance contributes to a sense of security, fostering a positive perception of public transportation and encouraging greater confidence among PWDs, senior citizens, and pregnant women to utilize these services.
- **Re-engineering Public Utility Vehicles (PUV)/ Public Transportation into PWD, Senior Citizen, Pregnant Women-Friendly Vehicles:** To comprehensively address the accessibility challenges in public transportation, a pivotal solution involves re-engineering public utility vehicles (PUVs) to become more accommodating to PWDs, senior citizens, and pregnant women. This could include modifications such as low-floor boarding systems, priority seating areas, and safety features tailored to

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the specific needs of these passenger groups. Re-engineering vehicles aligns with the principles of universal design, making public transportation more inclusive by considering the diverse needs of all passengers. This solution not only ensures a safer and more comfortable journey for vulnerable groups but also promotes a shift towards a universally accessible public transportation system that prioritizes the well-being and convenience of every commuter.

PROPOSED INITIATIVE

The proposed initiative aims to develop and implement a comprehensive training manual. This manual is designed specifically for public transportation staff and transit hubs to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. The initiative recognizes that the inadequacy of public transportation facilities poses a significant hurdle for PWDs and senior citizens, hindering their accessibility and independence. To address this, the training manual will offer practical guidance on how public transportation staff can effectively engage with and assist these individuals. The focus will extend beyond the technical aspects of infrastructure modifications, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal skills, empathy, and respectful communication.

By equipping public transportation staff with the knowledge and skills outlined in the training manual, the initiative seeks to transform the passenger experience for PWDs and senior citizens. From ensuring seamless boarding procedures to providing the necessary assistance during the journey, the goal is to create an environment that prioritizes the well-being and dignity of all passengers, irrespective of their physical abilities or age. This initiative is a proactive step toward instilling a culture of inclusivity within the public transportation system. By emphasizing engagement, support, and assistance in the training manual, the aim is to cultivate a mindset shift among public transportation staff, fostering a more welcoming and accessible experience for PWDs and senior citizens. Ultimately, this initiative contributes to building a transportation network that reflects the principles of equality and responsiveness to the diverse needs of its passengers.

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