

PUBLIC TRANSPORT AUTHORITY BUSES — WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY

566. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Disability Services:

I refer to the minister's promise last November that she would investigate complaints that new public transport buses are not completely accessible for people in wheelchairs because the ramps cannot be lowered far enough.

- (1) Is the claim true?
- (2) If so, what is the Barnett government doing to ensure that people in wheelchairs can access public transport without assistance?

Hon HELEN MORTON replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(2) Hon Sue Ellery did indeed ask me on 8 November 2012 about the difficulties being experienced by people in wheelchairs in accessing the ramps on some of the new buses. I raised this matter with both the Disability Services Commission and the Minister for Transport. I was subsequently advised by the Minister for Transport that a meeting took place on 18 December 2012 between representatives from People With Disabilities WA, which is a highly regarded advocacy organisation, and representatives from the Public Transport Authority to discuss the issues related to wheelchair ramps on buses.

I am advised that the meeting was a valuable opportunity for the PTA to demonstrate the operation of a new Volvo low-floor accessible bus and a bus stop recently upgraded under the PTA's bus stop accessibility works program. Minister Buswell advised me in a letter dated 9 January 2013 that the PTA's investigation of the access ramps on the new Volvo buses revealed that the factory ride-height settings were inconsistent and often set too high. This had the effect of raising the bus too high even when the bus was lowered to operate the access ramps. He advised me that this matter could be addressed by simply reprogramming the ride-height settings on each bus and that a program to do this was underway. I understand that this was completed in March 2013.

The meeting in December also afforded an opportunity for PWDWA representatives to highlight concerns about a potentially slippery tape edge on the bus access ramp, which I am advised would also be easily rectified. I have been notified today that enhancements to address these concerns are being undertaken. The on-site consultation highlighted the importance of the PTA's BSAWP when these works typically incorporate raising the passenger boarding area–kerb height to 150 millimetres above the road surface. Raising the kerb height reduces the resultant ramp incline and is of critical importance to ramp users. The BSAWP currently upgrades over 600 bus stops per annum, and this meeting provided an opportunity to discuss future arrangements whereby the PWDWA may advise the PTA of priority bus stops to be upgraded so that they may be fast-tracked into future works planning.

I am advised that there was a very satisfactory exchange of ideas, issues and concerns for both parties. I wrote to Hon Sue Ellery on 1 February 2013 and provided this information to her.