Wheelchairs and Mobility Scooters
A guide for safe travel in Queensland
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Introduction

Mobility devices such as wheelchairs and mobility scooters are an essential part of daily life for people with a mobility impairment. More and more Queenslanders are using mobility devices every year and this number is expected to keep growing as Queensland’s population grows older.

The Department of Transport and Main Roads welcomes and encourages people with a mobility impairment to take advantage of public transport services. This booklet focuses on requirements for using the increasing number of accessible transport services, such as buses, trains, ferries and wheelchair accessible taxis.

It is important that you know your rights and responsibilities on public transport and know any other laws that apply to using your wheelchair or mobility scooter.

This booklet focuses on travelling with a wheelchair or mobility scooter in Queensland. If you are travelling outside Queensland, for example to another state or on a cruise liner, it is recommended that you check with the operator about what rules apply.
Wheelchairs and mobility scooters

This booklet covers the safe use of mobility scooters and wheelchairs, including manual and motorised.

There are sections, such as the registration section (page 9) that only apply to motorised wheelchairs including mobility scooters, but not manual wheelchairs.

You need to identify whether your device is a wheelchair or mobility scooter because there are different rules for using mobility scooters in taxis. An example of each is shown above.

Users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters intending to travel by public transport should consider the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (Transport Standards). Details are set out from page 18.
What to consider before buying

Local advice

Before buying a wheelchair or mobility scooter, make sure the device you choose meets the laws or rules that apply to using mobility devices in Queensland. It is a good idea to speak with a retailer who is familiar with Queensland laws and rules.

Some retailers provide user training for customers they sell a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter to. This can be useful in teaching users about the features and safe use of the particular model purchased.

Where you will use it

To be sure you can use your wheelchair or mobility scooter as planned, consider the following before you buy:

- How far do you need to travel?
- Where will you be travelling? (page 12)
- Will the mobility device fit on public transport? (page 18–23)
- What surfaces will you be travelling on (for example, rocks or very uneven surfaces)? (page 7)
- Do you need to register your mobility device? (page 9–11)

If you want to use public transport with your wheelchair or mobility scooter, you should consider the Transport Standards.¹

Choose a product that has an effective braking system and is stable under the forces of vehicle acceleration and cornering.

Safety for you and your fellow passengers or pedestrians is the number one priority.

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¹ Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 - administered by the Australian Government’s Attorney-General’s Department.
Motorised wheelchairs and mobility scooters are not safe for everyone

This section does not apply to manual wheelchairs.

There is no doubt that motorised wheelchairs and mobility scooters are useful for people with a mobility impairment. However, that doesn’t mean anyone with a mobility impairment is able to use a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter.

For example, some models require the user to have strong manual handling skills to operate the controls properly. They might also require the user to have very good balance.

If there are any concerns about your ability to safely use a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter, seek an assessment by a health professional to decide whether a motorised device is safe for you.

Tragically, people die each year from crashes involving motorised wheelchairs and mobility scooters and this number has rapidly increased in recent years. Remember that crashes involving a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter can result in hospitalisation and may also be fatal.

These devices can move more quickly than the average pedestrian, especially when travelling downhill. It is important to choose a device that suits your abilities.

Your needs and abilities

It a good idea to have an assessment by a health professional before buying a wheelchair or mobility scooter, but it is not a requirement.

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Eyesight, reaction time, sitting balance, posture, concentration and clear thinking are important considerations.

A doctor, occupational therapist or physiotherapist can provide advice on your individual needs.

You will need a medical certificate in order to register a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter. Find out more on page 10.

Choose a wheelchair or mobility scooter that is suitable for your abilities and build. The size and weight of the person operating a wheelchair or mobility scooter can affect its stability, especially when turning in tight circles or while travelling onboard public transport.

Provided your wheelchair or mobility scooter meets the assumptions in the Transport Standards, you can be confident it will fit on accessible public transport.

**Stability**

Choosing a smaller device may not mean it is easier for you to use.

Smaller mobility scooters and some three wheeled devices may be less stable for some individuals, particularly when travelling over uneven surfaces or on public transport.

Smaller devices may not be as versatile as slightly larger models.
Borrowing, lending or buying second hand

**This section does not apply to manual wheelchairs.**

Buying a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter second hand without first seeking advice from a health professional is not encouraged.

It is also recommended you do not borrow one or loan yours to a friend. When registering your device, you must declare that it will be used solely by the registered operator.

Do not assume that because you have used a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter before, that you can use any mobility device. There are many different models, each with different features and characteristics. It is important to be very familiar with a device and the location of its controls.

If there was an emergency, could you find the brakes quickly – without having to think about it? A split second delay or a simple mistake with the controls could result in a crash or injury to you and other people.
Registration

In Queensland, a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter that is used outside of the home, for example on footpaths and to cross roads, must be registered with the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

For the purpose of this section an electric wheelchair or mobility scooter is defined as a motorised wheelchair. A motorised wheelchair must be registered before it can be used outside of the home, for example on a footpath. To be registered, the motorised wheelchair must meet certain requirements, specifically:

- has a tare weight of no more than 150 kilograms
- cannot travel more than 10 kilometres per hour on level ground
- is designed and built for a seated person with mobility difficulties
- is not propelled by a combustion engine.

Registration does not mean that the device can be used on the road in the same way as a car. Find out more on page 13.

The tare weight refers to the device only, and does not include the user, goods or equipment.
Registration for motorised wheelchairs

To register a motorised wheelchair, you (or your representative) must:

- visit a Department of Transport and Main Roads Customer Service Centre
- complete the required forms, being a Registration Application Form (F3518), a Vehicle Details Form (F3529) and a Motorised Wheelchair Statement (F4414) and
- provide a certificate, statement or letter from either a medical practitioner or a registered occupational therapist, or a registered physiotherapist.

The Motorised Wheelchair Statement must declare that the motorised wheelchair will be used solely by the registered operator.

The certificate, statement or letter must confirm that due to a physical or medical condition your mobility is severely impaired and you require the use of a motorised wheelchair for assisted travel.

Registration is provided free of charge and includes compulsory third party insurance which may protect the user against
compensation claims for personal injury following a crash. For example a crash between a motorised wheelchair and a pedestrian on the footpath where the motorised wheelchair user was at fault.

Each time you register a different motorised wheelchair you must complete the relevant forms and provide a medical certificate, statement or letter.

Copies of the relevant forms, including the Motorised Wheelchair Statement form can be found at www.tmr.qld.gov.au, by calling 13 23 80 or by visiting a Department of Transport and Main Roads Customer Service Centre.

This section does not apply to manual wheelchairs or wheeled recreational devices

Limitation on use of motorised wheelchairs that are not registered

Mobility devices that exceed the legal definitions for a motorised wheelchair – such as devices that can travel too fast – cannot be registered.

If a mobility device cannot be registered, it can only be used on areas that are not described as roads or road-related areas, such as inside the home.

Driver licensing

You do not need a licence to use a motorised wheelchair.

For more information on registration and licensing visit the department’s website at www.tmr.qld.gov.au or call 13 23 80.
Using a wheelchair or mobility scooter on footpaths and roads

The Queensland Road Rules

A person with a mobility impairment who uses a wheelchair or mobility scooter is considered to be a pedestrian under the Queensland Road Rules.

By law, wheelchairs or mobility scooters used by people with a mobility impairment can go anywhere a pedestrian can go, such as footpaths, shopping centres and nature strips.

Road rules that apply to pedestrians also apply to wheelchair and mobility scooter users. These are:

**Footpaths:** Wheelchairs and mobility scooters can be used on footpaths, bicycle paths, shared paths and nature strips (such as grass verges between the footpath and the road). Pathways must be used wherever possible to avoid riding on the road.

**On the road:** You must not use your wheelchair or mobility scooter on the road in the same way as a car.
A wheelchair or mobility scooter can only be taken on the road if there is no footpath, pathway or nature strip available, and only where a pedestrian is allowed to walk.

If you do need to use the road, stay as close as possible to the side of the road, and travel in the opposite direction to traffic so you have good visibility.

If you need to cross a road, always cross at the safest possible point. Use pedestrian crossings, traffic lights or refuge islands if available.

You must obey all traffic signals intended for pedestrians.

**Safety tips on footpaths and roads**

- Travel at a speed suitable to the conditions.
- Use streets with footpaths or other off-road pathways, where possible.
- Try to avoid hilly routes if an alternative route is available because these use more power and may be more difficult to navigate safely.
- Make turns slowly.
- Approach ramps and kerbs head-on.
- Be careful around parked cars.
- Be aware that your smaller size often makes you less visible.
- If you have a battery power gauge, be mindful that the second half of the battery is drained more quickly than the first half.
As visibility on roads and paths is often poor at night, try and make sure pedestrians and motorists can see you.

- Wear brightly coloured clothes.
- Display a white light at the front, a red light at the back and reflectors for times when there is less daylight.


**Maintenance**

You should keep your wheelchair or mobility scooter in good repair and do maintenance regularly. Before each trip, check it over.

- Is it in safe working order?
- Are the tyres pumped up?
- Are the brakes functioning properly?
- Are all the lights and indicators working?
- Is your battery fully charged?

If you have a motorised device, make sure the battery is fully charged. A flat battery can make it difficult to climb a ramp and board public transport unassisted. As well, a flat battery may leave you stranded.
Breakdown recovery

RACQ offers an Emergency Wheelchair Breakdown Service throughout Queensland if you do break down and some retailers offer a ‘recovery’ service when you buy a mobility device from them.

Before you get onboard public transport

Public transport operators have spent time and money to make many of their vehicles and services accessible to people with a mobility impairment.

Before you start travelling onboard public transport with a wheelchair or mobility scooter, it is a good idea to be aware of your rights and responsibilities.

Do your homework

If you have never taken your wheelchair or mobility scooter on public transport before, do some research before you leave home.

Make sure your wheelchair or mobility scooter is public transport friendly and meets the Transport Standards (page 18). If you have specific concerns or questions about travelling on public transport, discuss them with the transport company.
Practise before you need to travel

Consider taking your wheelchair or mobility scooter on public transport just to learn how to get around, before you need to get somewhere.

For example, you may wish to travel off-peak on buses, trains and ferries for your first few journeys, especially if you are uncertain about how you will go.

There will be fewer people onboard and you will have more time and space to learn how to use your wheelchair or mobility scooter.

Queensland Rail holds Rail Safety and Orientation Days four times a year at Roma Street train station, Brisbane. A platform is closed to the public to allow participants to explore a train at leisure. You can practise boarding and getting off a train using the boarding ramp and can speak with a train guard and Queensland Rail staff.
Plan each journey

It is a good idea to plan ahead when wanting to travel on public transport. Many services are accessible for passengers travelling with wheelchairs and mobility scooters, but some are not.

If you are booking a taxi, you should let the booking company know the taxi will be used to transport a wheelchair or mobility scooter. Users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters must be given priority over general taxi and group bookings.

Queensland Rail does not require advance notice of your plans if you intend on travelling on the City Network. If you are planning to travel on Queensland Rail’s Traveltrain services, please contact their Customer Care Centre to discuss travel requirements.

If you are planning to travel by other modes of public transport such as buses and ferries, and you have specific travel needs or particular questions, play it safe and raise them with the transport operator before travelling.

If you give the operator time to plan ahead, they will be better prepared to assist you and ensure you have a safe and comfortable journey.
Travelling on public transport

The Transport Standards

The Transport Standards⁵ are a set of standards that public transport services in all states and territories of Australia must meet. The Transport Standards give timeframes for transport operators to ensure their services meet various accessibility measures.

For example, from 31 December 2012 the maximum door clearance and internal head height in a wheelchair accessible taxi must be 1500 millimetres.⁶

They also describe minimum requirements for making public transport more usable by adding features like:

- low floors
- grab rails
- wider doorways.

These features make public transport safer and easier for every person to use, regardless of their age or ability.

For people with a disability, people with prams, the elderly and anyone who has difficulty walking, accessibility features are essential. Without these features, some passengers would not be able to get onboard.

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⁵ Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 - administered by the Australian Government’s Attorney-General’s Department.

⁶ For more information about the target dates for implementation of the Transport Standards, read the Transport and Main Roads information bulletin Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.
Meeting the Transport Standards

The Transport Standards apply to public transport such as buses, trains, ferries and wheelchair accessible taxis.

They do not apply to dedicated school buses, limousines and small aircraft (less than 30 seats) because these are excluded under legislation.

This means that dedicated school buses, limousines and small aircraft are not required to be accessible to users of wheelchairs or mobility scooters.\(^7\)

An increasing number of public transport services in Queensland are accessible. All public transport vehicles brought into use after 2002 must meet the Transport Standards.

Public transport vehicles that were brought in to use before the Transport Standards were introduced in 2002 must meet accessibility targets over a period of time.

There are a series of targets that operators must meet for improved accessibility of their transport services, requiring all public transport services to be fully accessible by the end of 2032.\(^8\)

Any operator who is unable to meet the specifications set out in the Transport Standards may still comply with the Transport Standards by providing equivalent access without discrimination as far as is possible.

Equivalent access means that an alternative way of access to a public transport service can be provided, with equivalence of amenity, availability, comfort, convenience, dignity, price and safety.

\(^7\) Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 - administered by the Australian Government’s Attorney-General’s Department.

\(^8\) For more information about the target dates for implementation of the Transport Standards, read the Transport and Main Roads information bulletin Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.
Characteristics of a public transport friendly wheelchair or mobility scooter

The Transport Standards are the minimum accessibility standards that public transport must be designed to accommodate. They are based on assumptions about the size and design of wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

If you use or are planning to purchase a wheelchair or mobility scooter to travel on public transport you should consider these assumed specifications, set out below, to enhance your safety and accessibility.

If your wheelchair or mobility scooter meets these specifications, you will be able to travel on all accessible public transport in Queensland. If it does not, it may not be suitable for use on public transport and you may not be able to travel as intended.

Transport Standards – Dimensions

Size: fits in an allocated space of 1300 mm by 800 mm.

Total width: less than 750 mm (due to the minimum width of an access path between the front wheel arches of a bus).

Total height: less than 1400 mm when you are seated (only applies when travelling in wheelchair accessible taxis).

9. From 31 December 2012, the maximum height for a wheelchair or mobility scooter travelling onboard wheelchair accessible taxis will be increased to 1500 mm.
Transport Standards – Weight

Boarding devices such as ramps and hoists can support a total weight of 300 kg. This total includes the wheelchair or mobility scooter, its occupant and carried goods.

Be mindful that if someone gives you assistance with boarding by pushing your manual wheelchair up a boarding ramp, their weight is also included.

Transport Standards – Manoeuvrability

• Cross a horizontal gap up to 40 mm wide.
• Mount a vertical rise (bump) up to 12 mm high.
• Cross grating gaps up to 13 mm wide and 150 mm long.
• Climb a 1:14 grade ramp unassisted.
• Climb a 1:8 grade ramp unassisted if the ramp is less than 1520 mm long.
• Climb a 1:4 grade ramp with assistance.
Transport Standards – Turning

To be certain that you will be able to access infrastructure and buildings associated with public transport, your wheelchair or mobility scooter may need to be able to turn 180 degrees within an area of 2070 mm by 1540 mm.

Adding fixtures

If you want to continue to travel onboard public transport with your wheelchair or mobility scooter, keep the Transport Standards in mind when attaching fixtures.

For example, if you attach a flag or canopy to your wheelchair or mobility scooter, how do these changes affect its overall height or weight? If a canopy causes your wheelchair or mobility scooter to exceed the specified height under the Transport Standards, you could be refused access to that service.

Belongings

Be aware that carrying heavy belongings will add extra weight to your wheelchair or mobility scooter and may affect its dimensions. This may cause problems when boarding public transport if it causes you to exceed the specifications of the Transport Standards. The maximum weight that boarding devices can support is 300 kilograms.

Distribution of weight

Consider how unevenly distributed weight could affect the balance of your wheelchair or mobility scooter, particularly when you are turning or travelling onboard public transport, which may unexpectedly brake or accelerate.
Restraints for a wheelchair or mobility scooter on public transport

Restraints and anchoring points are compulsory in taxis and your wheelchair or mobility scooter must have appropriate anchorage points. The minimum standard for wheelchair restraint assemblies in wheelchair accessible taxis in Queensland is a four-point restraint system.¹⁰

Therefore, to be confident that your wheelchair or mobility scooter will be able to be securely anchored in a taxi, it should be fitted with four tie-down points – two at the front and two at the rear.¹¹

It is a good idea to consider buying a wheelchair or mobility scooter with this anchorage system in case you wish to travel with it by taxi (see page 29 for more information about taxi travel).

Restraints and anchoring points are not compulsory in trains, ferries and buses, so you may not be able to tie down your wheelchair or mobility scooter while onboard these vehicles.

Seatbelts

If it is compulsory for all passengers to wear a seatbelt, then it is compulsory for a person travelling onboard in a wheelchair or mobility scooter to wear one that is fitted to the vehicle.

¹⁰ The specifications are set out in Australian Standard 10542:2009 (Wheelchair Tiedown and Occupant Restraint Systems).
¹¹ The mobility device should meet Australian Standard 3696:2009 (Wheeled mobility devices for use as seats in motor vehicles).
Travelling on different modes of public transport

Assistance from the driver or operator

By law, transport operators must give passengers reasonable assistance to safely board or leave a vehicle.\(^\text{12}\) However, how much assistance they have to give is not stated. Operators and drivers must decide how much assistance they consider is reasonable to give you.

Here are some examples of the assistance that transport drivers and operators may provide:

- extending an accessible ramp
- lowering a bus to kneeling position for ease of boarding
- waiting until a passenger has positioned their wheelchair or mobility scooter in an allocated space on a bus before driving away
- securing anchorage straps in wheelchair accessible taxis.

The transport operator is responsible for ensuring the safety of all passengers. They have the right to refuse access if they believe a wheelchair or mobility scooter does not meet the assumed specifications in the Transport Standards (page 20), or could be a risk to passengers.

Travelling with a carer

You may need to travel with a carer if you need assistance when travelling. For example, you may need assistance to:

- move from your mobility scooter into a fixed seat when travelling in a taxi
- board public transport by having your wheelchair pushed up the boarding ramp.

A transport operator may not be able to provide the kind of assistance you require for health and safety reasons. Transport providers must also consider the safety of all passengers and their drivers.

**Direction of travel**

Transport operators may determine the orientation of passengers in public transport vehicles. For example, wheelchairs must be secured facing forwards in taxis and on some buses the allocated space is configured so that users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters can travel most safely facing backwards.

You can approach the transport operator if you have a preference for facing in a certain direction to see whether they are able to accommodate your preference.
Buses

To board and disembark from a bus, the bus driver can assist you by placing a ramp at the front door of the bus to meet the ground. Low floor buses can also ‘kneel’ to the height of the kerb to make boarding the bus safer and easier.

When onboard, you will normally need to be able to make a 90 degree turn to travel between the wheel arches of the bus. You should position your wheelchair or mobility scooter within the accessible space and apply the brakes.

Make sure your wheelchair or mobility scooter does not intrude into the aisle or impede access for other passengers.

Be aware that the forces of acceleration, turning and braking can be strong so it is important that your wheelchair or mobility scooter is stable and has effective braking that you can use while the transport is in motion.

Students with a disability who require assistance to travel to school should discuss their needs with the school principal.
Long distance buses

It is recommended that you contact the operator, who will confirm whether an accessible long distance coach service is available and will provide you with information about access.

There are a number of issues you will need to consider before undertaking a long distance coach journey, such as:

- duration of the journey and frequency of rest stops
- whether you will need assistance to transfer from your wheelchair or mobility scooter to a fixed seat
- whether you need to travel with a carer.

Trains

If you plan to use Queensland Rail City Network services in Brisbane, it is recommended that you find out which stations meet your access needs by referring to the Station Access Guide, available from Queensland Rail at www.queenslandrail.com.au.

To assist you to board and disembark from a City Network train, staff will place a ramp between the platform and the carriage in front of the assisted boarding area. Let the guard know if you require assistance and tell them your destination.

If you need manual assistance to use the ramp, remember that a ramp can accept a maximum of 300 kilograms including you, your wheelchair or mobility scooter and any carried goods.

Be mindful that if someone gives you assistance with boarding by pushing your wheelchair up the boarding ramp, their weight is also included.

For information about access on the Queensland Rail Travel Network (long distance), visit www.queenslandrail.com.au.
Ferries

You should contact the operator if you plan to travel on a ferry in your wheelchair or mobility scooter. They will confirm whether an accessible service is available and will provide you with information about access.

Keep in mind that daily changes in tide heights can affect the steepness of the boarding ramp when you board a ferry. Make sure the battery in a motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter is fully charged so you can get up the ramp.

Aircraft

The Transport Standards apply to aircraft, except small aircraft (less than 30 seats). Different airlines have different policies, so you should contact individual airlines for more information about service accessibility.
Taxis

The Australian Standard on the safe carriage of wheelchairs suggests it is less safe to be seated in a wheelchair or mobility scooter than in a vehicle seat while travelling onboard a motor vehicle.¹³

When travelling in a wheelchair accessible taxi¹⁴, mobility scooter users must relocate to a fixed seat. It is unsafe to travel onboard while seated on a mobility scooter because of their specific structural characteristics. For example, they often have adjustable or swivelling seats and a steering column.

Due to design differences, wheelchair users may travel in a taxi while seated on a wheelchair as long as the passenger is restrained and the device is appropriately secured. All taxi users, including people travelling in a wheelchair must wear a seatbelt. The department’s wheelchair accessible taxi policy states that at a minimum a lap-sash belt must be fitted for each seating position.

Wheelchairs and their occupants must be secured facing forwards and their wheelchair anchored. If you relocate to a fixed seat, it is safe for your wheelchair or mobility scooter to be carried in a wheelchair accessible taxi. It must be small enough to access the vehicle and have an appropriate four-point restraint.

For more information about travelling in a wheelchair accessible taxi, please refer to the department's Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Guide.

¹⁴ For more information, please refer to the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Guide.
Summary Checklist

The following is a summary of the important considerations identified in this booklet for individuals who use or who are planning to purchase a wheelchair or mobility scooter, to maximise safety and accessibility.

Would you benefit from an assessment by a health professional before buying a wheelchair or mobility scooter, to provide advice on your individual needs?

Do you intend to use a motorised wheelchair on footpaths or nature strips? If yes, it must be registered.

Is your motorised wheelchair (or mobility scooter) eligible for registration?

It must:

• have a tare weight of no more than 150 kilograms

• not be able to travel more than 10 kilometres per hour on level ground

• be designed and built for a seated person with mobility difficulties

• not be propelled by a combustion engine.
To register your motorised wheelchair do you have:

- a Motorised Wheelchair Statement and
- a certificate, statement or letter from either a medical practitioner or a registered occupational therapist, or a registered physiotherapist stating that due to severe movement impairment you have a need to use the device for assisted travel?

Have you considered whether the wheelchair or mobility scooter will fit on public transport?

Your accessibility will be improved if:

- it fits in an allocated space of 1300 mm by 800 mm
- it is less than 750 mm wide
- the total height when you are seated on it is less than 1400 mm
- the total weight of you and the mobility device is less than 300 kg
- it is fitted with four tie-down points
- It meets the manoeuvrability assumptions of the Transport Standards (see page 21).
More information
Interpreter service: 13 14 50
Direct telephone typewriter (TTY): 3369 3377
National Relay Service (TTY) and modem: 13 36 77
Speech to speech relay service: 1300 555 727*.
Need help making phone calls? Contact the National Relay Service (NRS) on 1800 555 677** (free service).

*Cost of a local call. Higher call charges apply for calls from mobile phones and payphones.
**Free call from anywhere in Australia, call charges apply for calls from mobile phones and payphones.