

Press Release

4 December 2008

PUBLIC SUPPORT WHEELCHAIR ACCESS ON BUSES

Capability Scotland today welcomed public backing from the people of Edinburgh for disabled access on the city's buses.

Lothian Buses give wheelchair users and other disabled people priority in the use of the wheelchair space on their buses. However a group of local mothers have submitted a petition to the Scottish parliament calling for equal access to public buses for people using prams and buggies.

A Mori poll of over 1000 people has revealed 57% believed that wheelchairs should be given priority over prams, while only 8% felt prams should take priority. A further 27% felt whoever was on the bus first should get priority.

Elsbeth Molony, Capability's Corporate Policy and Consultancy Manager, said: "These survey results show the majority of people in Edinburgh support access to buses for disabled people, particularly wheelchair users. We are all looking for the same solution - better access for all - but we recognise, as the public do, that disabled people should have priority.

"It's great that parents or carers with prams or buggies can benefit from improved access for disabled people, such as low floor buses and the wheelchair space within buses. But it is important not to lose sight of why these improvements have been made in the first place - to end the exclusion of disabled people. "

The group who submitted the petition, "Mums Use Buses Too", suggest that parents with buggies and prams occupying the wheelchair space would leave the bus if it is required by a disabled person.

Elsbeth said: "This is clearly the most sensible solution, and the one that Capability Scotland supports, but unfortunately Lothian Buses knows from experience that it is more common for people to refuse to vacate the space when it is required by a disabled person.

"Disabled people have rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and Lothian Buses, as a service provider, has responsibilities to ensure that their service is accessible as reasonably practicable. Lothian Buses have invested a great deal in upgrading their fleet to almost 100% accessibility in order to meet its legal requirements and improve bus travel for disabled people. However, this commitment will be in vain if other bus users don't recognise the rights of disabled people to access the buses."

Ian Craig, Lothian Buses Managing Director, said: "These survey results confirm that our current policy is correct. This statistically robust evidence clearly states that the majority of the public are sensitive and sympathetic towards the need to protect access to buses for wheelchair users in our community."

Ends

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Note to editors:

The Ipsos MORI survey results were taken from the Autumn Edinburgh Household survey and consisted of 1035 face to face surveys. The question asked was:

Buses have limited space for wheelchairs and prams. Which do you think should have priority?

Results were:

- Wheelchairs should have priority 57%
- Prams should have priority 8%
- Whichever is on the bus first should have priority 27%
- Don't know 7%