## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword from the Chairman of the Forum</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Recommendations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 Background</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 Role of the Department of Transport in the Maritime</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 Maritime Passenger Transport Forum</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Ship Sub-Group</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Port Sub-Group</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6 Implementation to Date of the Recommendations of the</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1 Ship Sub-Group Report</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2 Port Sub-Group Report</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword from the Chairman

I am very pleased to have been given the opportunity to chair the Maritime Passenger Transport Forum, established under the Department of Transport’s Sectoral Plan. That Plan is aptly named “Transport Access for All”. The words “for all” encapsulate very neatly the core intention of the Government and the Houses of the Oireachtas, when enacting the Disability Act 2005, namely, that right across Irish society, we organise our affairs so that all citizens are included in the Nation’s social, economic and cultural life.

Every transport sector presents its own specific challenges in terms of ensuring acceptable access standards and the maritime sector is no different. The maritime sector is a very diverse sector with a large number of service providers, whether they are passenger vessel operators or port and harbour authorities. It links us with our neighbours internationally; is a crucial link for citizens living on and visiting our offshore islands; and it has a tourism dimension in both our inland and inshore waterways. Its very diversity represents a distinct challenge for us to assess just how well the sector is performing in terms of ensuring “access for all” and to identify where improvements are needed.

One of the main difficulties we have in our maritime passenger transport sector is that we do not have a national overview of how we are performing in terms of accessibility to passengers with mobility and sensory impairments or where the improvements are needed. Therefore, the essence of the work of the Forum to date has been to identify the access standards, which we already have in place, to identify many of the improvements needed and to draw up a plan of implementation.

This report sets out our work to date and recommends specific action points for the next couple of years to make maritime passenger facilities more accessible to people with disabilities.

I would like to thank all the service providers, Government Departments and agency officials and most importantly, the representatives from organisations representing people with disabilities whose contributions were essential to the work of the Forum and this report. I would like to pay special appreciation to the officials of the Department of Transport who worked tirelessly to ensure this process worked so well.

The commitment of the Government to making Ireland a better place to live for people with disabilities is given a statutory basis in the Disability Act 2005. However, unless owners and operators of maritime passenger services take seriously their responsibilities under the Disability Act 2005, the recommendations of this Forum will not in itself bring about a more accessible maritime passenger environment.
We are charting a course for the future but it will require cooperation and commitment from both Government agencies and private industry to arrive at a successful conclusion and provide maritime passenger facilities that provide access for all.

Dr. Vincent J. G. Power
Summary of Recommendations of the Forum

The Forum recommends that:

1. the Department of Transport use the findings of Configure’s report to develop an action plan to improve accessibility for people with disabilities;

2. in line with the recommendations of the two sub-groups of the Forum, individual vessel operators and port/harbour authorities conduct self audits of their vessels and ports/harbours;

3. the Department of Transport consider developing a ‘template/checklist’ for both vessel operators and port/harbour authorities to assist them in conducting self audits;

4. vessel operators and port/harbour authorities provide information on their access facilities through their websites and information literature, to enable people with disabilities to make informed decisions before undertaking journeys;

5. the Department of Transport draft general guidelines, in conjunction with the NDA, to assist and support maritime passenger transport service operators in making their services more accessible to passengers with disabilities, in consultation with relevant stakeholders;

6. the Department of Transport provide links from its website to other websites providing up to date information on service improvements in the industry;

7. the Department of Transport consider funding suitable projects which will provide simple but effective improvements on existing vessels based on the findings of Configure’s report;

8. the Department of Transport provide two more disability awareness training courses for vessel operators in other locations around the country in 2009;

9. in the medium to longer term the Department of Transport draft more comprehensive guidelines or Codes of Practice, in consultation with relevant stakeholders;

10. the Department of Transport maintain the Forum in place to monitor progress on a cross cutting basis but also to contribute to developing and advising on further proposals for improvements; and
11. an annual meeting of industry representatives be held as a useful way of sharing knowledge and experiences of accessibility improvements and development. The Forum would be prepared to organise such a meeting.
Chapter 1 Background

The Disability Act 2005 is a positive action measure designed to support the provision of disability-specific services to people with disabilities and to improve access to mainstream public services for people with disabilities.

Part 3 of the Act of 2005 requires six Government Departments to prepare plans, known as Sectoral Plans, which set out how they will deliver specific services for people with disabilities.

The Department of Transport’s Sectoral Plan was published in June 2006 and is entitled “Transport Access for All”. The Plan sets out the specific accessibility issues relevant to each area of transport and the proposals of the Minister for Transport, and the agencies under the Minister’s aegis, in relation to rolling out a programme of accessible transport designed to develop public transport services for the greatest number of people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments.

Mobility is the key to equal citizenship in a society which sets a high value on personal independence and freedom to move around. The adequate provision of an accessible public travel and transport service is one of the significant services that impact on the quality of all transport users, even to the most able-bodied, and issues relating to transport accessibility go far beyond the needs of people with disabilities. They impact on the transport needs of the entire population because most people, at some point in their lives, are likely to acquire a physical or other impairment or be impeded in some manner, that will make travelling difficult, if not impossible, on what one might call ‘traditional’ type transport vehicles or vessels. This is particularly the case as people advance through the ageing process. It is also the case that there is a high correlation between age and disability.

Accordingly, in addressing the issue of transport accessibility, the Department of Transport has adopted the term accessible transport for people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments. The Department has defined this term in its Sectoral Plan as follows:

“People with physical, sensory, learning or cognitive difficulties (whether permanent or temporary) and others whose access to traditionally constructed transport vehicles, services and infrastructures is limited, to a greater or lesser extent, on account of age, because of accompanying children or because they are carrying luggage or shopping or are otherwise impaired in their use of the transport system.”
Accordingly, in addressing the issue of accessibility within the maritime passenger transport sector, this report takes this same approach. Such a concept includes a broad proportion of the population and not just people with disabilities.

A major component of this is the adequate provision of an integrated accessible transport service which includes maritime passenger transport services that enable older people and ageing people and people with disabilities to fully participate in society.

The Department’s Sectoral Plan sets a series of objectives and targets across the various transport modes. The maritime passenger transport element of the Plan deals with passenger ships on voyages within the State or to and from the State; the international ferry ports that they serve; and where applicable, regional ports and harbours. Information is provided on the measures to be taken by operators of passenger ships (i.e. a vessel carrying more than twelve passengers) and certain ports for the purpose of facilitating access by people with disabilities to maritime passenger transport services and the timeframe within which such measures are to be taken.

In order to oversee the implementation and review of the maritime section of the Plan, the Maritime Passenger Transport Forum was established. This report sets out the work of the Forum to date and the conclusions and recommendations of the Forum on measures to be undertaken to progress accessibility in the maritime passenger transport sector. In addition, the conclusions and recommendations of this report have been taken into account in the 2008 review of the Department of Transport’s Sectoral Plan and provide a basis for an expanded and more targeted policy with specific action points in the area of increased accessibility in the maritime passenger transport sector for the future.
Chapter 2 The Role of the Department of Transport in the Maritime Passenger Transport Sector

The Department of Transport’s role in the maritime sector includes policy and legislative development but also involves direct provision of various services, including, as the regulatory body, the surveying and inspection of ships and the management of marine incidents. The nature of the Department’s strategic planning in the maritime sector is thus somewhat different from its approach in other sectors, where the Minister’s function is essentially one of policy making and funding, with day to day service provision falling to agencies (such as the State’s operating companies in this sector). This is also the position in the area of disability access.

Maritime Passenger Transport Sector
The maritime passenger transport sector is a very diverse one. The passenger ships involved range from large modern international ferries serving ports in Britain and France, to medium sized passenger ships serving our offshore islands and small vessels plying short voyages on inshore waters and lakes. Vessels are almost all in private ownership.

Currently, none of the international ferries operating services to and from Ireland fly the Irish flag.

The extent of facilities for all passengers, not just those passengers with disabilities, varies considerably between the largest and the smallest ships and this reflects the length and nature of the vessels and the trips involved.

Similarly, the harbours/landing places to and from which these various passenger ships operate also vary considerably in size and facilities reflecting the vessel types and frequency of use as well as the investment made.

Passenger Ships
To operate as an international passenger ship, the ship must have a current passenger ship certificate from the flag state viz. the country in which the vessel is registered. To obtain such a certificate, the ship is surveyed on an annual basis to ensure compliance with international safety requirements for construction and safety equipment. As mentioned above, none of the international passenger ships operating out of Ireland are registered on the Irish flag so they are not surveyed by the Department of Transport marine surveyors for the purposes of issuing passenger ship certificates. However, they may be subject to inspections under what is known as the “port state control” regime to ensure safety standards are maintained (that is to say, the State in whose port the vessel
is located may exert some rights and inspect the vessel accordingly).

A domestic passenger ship, that is a ship operating within the State, is surveyed on an annual basis by the Department’s marine surveyors under domestic legislation and EU legislation as applicable.

**Standards for Access to Passenger Ships**

Passenger ships engaged in international voyages are governed by international agreements on shipping. Arising from these agreements, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has produced recommendations for international passenger vessels. These are contained in the document entitled IMO Circular MSC/735 of 24/06/1996 Recommendation on the design and operation of passenger ships to respond to elderly and disabled persons’ needs. These are recommendations only and are not mandatory.

In the case of domestic passenger ships, safety rules and standards are governed by EU Directive 98/18/EC, as amended. This Directive has been transposed into Irish law by Statutory Instrument No. 716 of 2004. The Directive, as amended by Directive 2003/24/EC which is aimed at certain categories of domestic passenger ships not engaged on international voyages, establishes standards of a general nature to assist passengers with reduced mobility.

The Directive requires that sea-going steel hulled vessels and all high-speed craft, used for public transport, the keel of which was laid or which were at a similar stage of construction, on or after 1 October 2004 shall comply, where practicable, with the guidelines in Annex III to the Directive on guidelines for persons with reduced mobility.

Also, in accordance with Directive 2003/24/EC, operators of the same categories of existing passenger ships, the keel of which was laid or which were at a similar stage of construction before 1 October 2004 and which undergo modification, must apply the guidelines in Annex III of the Directive, as far as is reasonable and practicable in economic terms.

To date, a total of only eight domestic Irish passenger ships fall within the terms of the Directive and only three have been built (or are currently under construction) since the entry into force of the legislation. Notwithstanding the limited number of vessels covered by the Directive, the Department of Transport, as a matter of policy, seeks compliance with the Directive on a voluntary basis during the construction of those categories of domestic passenger ships not covered by the Directive.
Ports and Harbours
The Department of Transport is responsible for national ports and shipping policy.

National ports policy is primarily aimed at ensuring that investment in commercial ports meets port capacity requirements and that commercial port services are effective, competitive and efficient.

With regard to the 10 regional harbours most of these are no longer used for commercial maritime transport. The Department is implementing a programme to transfer ownership of these harbours to local authorities. A number have already transferred. In cases where these harbours continue to handle commercial traffic, transfer to one of the commercial port companies will be considered.

There are six fishery harbour centres owned and operated by the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. A number of these harbours have domestic passenger services operating from them to offshore islands.

There is also a large number of harbours, landing places and slips owned and operated by local authorities. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is addressing these facilities in the Local Authority Plans chapter of its Sectoral Plan.

National shipping policy is aimed at maintaining and increasing Irish based ship ownership/management and developing the maritime cluster, so as to foster economic development and employment in the sector. The policy is implemented with the aid of the national promotional agency for the sector, the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO).
Establishment of the Forum
One of the key provisions of the maritime passenger transport section of the Department of Transport’s Sectoral Plan was the establishment by the end of 2006 of a Forum to oversee the implementation of that section of the plan.

The intention was that membership of the Forum would be as representative as possible of key stakeholders to ensure that cross-cutting issues could be addressed in a co-ordinated and co-operative manner.

The Maritime Passenger Transport Forum was established in December 2006. An independent chair was appointed, solicitor Dr. Vincent Power. The Secretariat to the Forum is provided by the Maritime Safety Directorate. The Forum comprises representatives of disability organisations, passenger ship and port services providers, relevant Government Departments and the National Disability Authority.

The Forum was asked to identify the access standards, which are already in place in the maritime sector, to agree on improvements needed and to draw up a plan of implementation.

Members of the Maritime Passenger Transport Forum
The members of the Maritime Passenger Transport Forum were:

Dr. Vincent Power (Chairman), Partner, A & L Goodbody Solicitors

Ms. Lorraine McGurk (Secretary), Maritime Safety Directorate, Department of Transport

Ms. Eilis O’Connor, Maritime Safety Directorate, Department of Transport

Mr. Michael O’Dwyer (replaced by Ms. Edwina O’Leary), Maritime Safety Directorate, Department of Transport

Mr. David Taylor, Maritime Safety Directorate, Department of Transport

Mr. James Snelgrove, Maritime Safety Directorate, Department of Transport

Ms. Helen Conway, Maritime Safety Directorate, Department of Transport

Mr. Darragh Higgins, Maritime Safety Directorate, Department of Transport
Ms. Catherine Campbell (replaced in turn by Mr. Ivor Geraghty, Ms. Marie McMahon, Mr. Conor McNally), Maritime Transport Division, Department of Transport

Mr. Niall Curran, Maritime Transport Division, Department of Transport

Ms. Maureen Power (replaced by Ms. Ann Deasy), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, formerly of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources

Mr. Aodhán MacCormaic, Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Mr. Eoin Corrigan (replaced in turn by Ms. Veronica Healy, Mr. Brendan Pocock, Mr. Neil Maher), Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Ms. Victoria Hughes, Stena Line

Mr. Colin Fleming, P & O Irish Sea

Mr. Alan Markey, Irish Ferries

Ms. Brenda Daly (replaced by Mr. Michael Lennon), Dublin Port Company

Mr. Patrick Luskin, Irish Passenger Boat & Ferry Operators Association

Mr. Donie O’Shea, National Disability Authority

Ms. Anne Waldek, Inclusion Ireland

Mr. Mark Barry, Irish Wheelchair Association

Mr. Desmond Kenny (replaced by Ms. Fiona Kelty), National Council for the Blind in Ireland

Mr. Malachy Foots, People with Disabilities in Ireland

Mr. Pat McKenna (replaced in turn by Mr. Michael Costello and Mr. Peter Derbyshire), and Ms. Freda Keenan, Irish Hard of Hearing Association

Mr. Eamon Kane, National Council on Ageing & Older People.
Terms of Reference of the Forum

The terms of reference adopted by the Forum to achieve its remit are as follows:

- to establish what are the standards already in place to ensure that passengers with disabilities can safely and efficiently access maritime passenger transport facilities without undue inconvenience or hardship;

- to identify any area where accessibility standards need to be improved;

- to propose an action plan to improve accessibility where such improvements have been identified;

- to consider mechanisms/ways, including codes of practice and regulatory requirements, to implement best practice with due regard to EU and International requirements and developments;

- to prepare a report on the points above, which report will form a key part of two year review of the Sectoral Plan for Transport and which is due in July 2008.

Methodology

Five plenary meetings of the Forum were held between March 2007 and June 2008. In order to complement the work of the Forum, two sub-groups were established; one to look at land based access (the port sub-group) and one to look at ship access (the ship sub-group). Furthermore, the work of the ship sub-group involved customer experience trips on international and domestic passenger ships. The ship sub-group carried out a “snap-shot” assessment of accessibility on board a number of passenger ships, from booking a journey to exiting the ship at the end of the journey and produced a report for the Forum on their findings. The port sub-group carried out a similar assessment of ports. The work of the two sub-groups and their recommendations in relation to improving access for passengers with disabilities to maritime passenger transport services is summarised in Chapters 4 and 5.

The port and ship operator representatives on the Forum were asked to prepare short reports for the Forum in relation to what measures they currently had in place to assist with access and any plans they had for improvements in the future.

The Forum obtained information from other countries, mainly the UK, and the US with regard to legislation and standards in place in those countries in the maritime sector for people with disabilities.
Publications from the National Disability Authority on different aspects of disability were a very useful source of information to the Forum. Indeed, the NDA assisted greatly in the work of the Forum and its contribution is much appreciated.

The Forum also kept itself informed of proposed developments at EU level in relation to persons with reduced mobility in the maritime sector.

The Forum viewed a DVD on Disability Awareness Training made by Videotel which is being used by a number of the international ferry companies operating services out of Ireland.

In conducting its work, the Forum followed the Guidelines for Consultation with Disability User Groups which were drawn up by the Public Transport Accessibility Committee (PTAC). PTAC is the primary consultative forum on the issue of public transport accessibility. The Committee’s remit is to advise the Minister for Transport on the accessibility aspects of public transport investment projects and on other public transport accessibility issues. Its remit has been extended to include a monitoring role in relation to progress on the Department of Transport’s Sectoral Plan.
As previously mentioned, the Forum, at its first meeting in March 2007 established the "ship sub-group" and provided it with terms of reference which are contained in the ship sub-group report at Appendix 1.

The ship sub-group consisted of representatives of service providers, disability bodies and Government Departments.

The group met on three occasions between April 2007 and May 2007 and carried out two customer experience trips. The first customer experience trip was conducted on board two international passenger ships and was attended by representatives of the Department of Transport, National Council for the Blind in Ireland, Irish Wheelchair Association, Irish Hard of Hearing Association, Inclusion Ireland, the National Council on Ageing and Older People, Irish Ferries and Stena Line. The second customer experience trip was conducted on domestic passenger ships and was attended by representatives of the Department and the Irish Passenger Boat and Ferry Operators Association. These trips produced a “snap-shot” assessment of facilities available on passenger ships. The findings were not exhaustive but it is hoped that they were helpful in understanding the situation on the ground and identifying what needs to be done.

Customer Experience Trip (International Passenger Ships)

The ship sub-group found that in general accessibility and facilities on-board the international vessels visited, Ulysses (an Irish Ferries vessel) and Stena Explorer (a Stena Line vessel) were very good and the staff were very helpful. Several observations of good practice with regard to people with disabilities were noted during the trip including:

- An easy to use website
- Accessible parking which was clearly marked
- Well signposted terminal building
- Helpful staff
- Suitable toilet facilities
- Onboard accommodation was both suitable and to a very high standard

One of the policies of Irish Ferries is to provide to people with disabilities the facility of direct email contact through their website with their Disability Officers for any query or special requests. So far in 2008, they have received over 200 emails from intending passengers with disabilities. This contact allowed bookings to be highlighted for port staff,
and helped ease people with reduced mobility through the embarkation stage of their journey.

The Forum notes however, that while the two international ferries visited have a high standard of accessibility, they are not necessarily representative of the standard across all passenger vessels on international voyages operating to and from Irish ports.

**Customer Experience Trip (Domestic Passenger Ships)**
The ship sub-group found that, in general, the disability access on board the domestic passenger vessels visited was reasonably good in some areas, but would benefit from improvement in other areas. Many of these issues would be relatively easy to resolve with simple and inexpensive solutions. The following observations include some of the good practice noted during the trip through Ros an Mhíl port with regard to people with disabilities:

- The terminal at Ros an Mhíl provided good parking for people with disabilities
- Signage at the terminal was good
- Staff were attentive and helpful
- Circulation on the vessels was generally adequate
- On one vessel, there were excellent audio and visual safety announcements in the main deck saloon. The announcements were clear with additional on-screen sign language and good visual demonstrations. All vessels would benefit from having this type of a facility in all areas.

**Follow-up to the Customer Experience Trips**
Following on from the customer experience trips the Forum is pleased to note that developments have taken place as follows:

Irish Ferries have put in place the following improvements:

- Check-in staff have been requested to notify car passengers with reduced mobility to display the sign “Passenger with mobility difficulties” on the side of the car that the passenger will exit the vehicle. This ensures that there is adequate space for the passenger to comfortably exit the car.

- All regular service announcements are pre-recorded onto a CD. This ensures that announcements are clear and of an adequate pitch for passengers who are hard of hearing.

- Announcements requesting all car, coach and freight passengers to return to their vehicles are now delivered on a repeat cycle as the vessel comes alongside its berth. This ensures that people with reduced mobility have plenty of time to get back to their cars before the vessel berths.
Large print notices regarding life jackets and other important advice are now available onboard vessels.

A number of fixed seats have been removed in cinemas to provide ample space for wheelchairs.

All staff have undergone disability awareness training.

Galway County Council has awarded a €40 million contract for the development of separate passenger, cargo and fishing facilities at Cill Ronáin. This development, when complete in 2010, will resolve the difficulties highlighted in the report of the ship sub-group report.

A contract for the development of floating pontoons at Ros an Mhíl was awarded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food subsequent to this site visit. This development when complete in 2009, will facilitate the removal of vehicular traffic from passenger handling areas and will also enable passenger loading on the main deck of vessels at all tides.

Ship Sub-Group Recommendations
When the work of the ship sub-group concluded, the following five recommendations were made in its report back to the Forum:

Recommendations
1. All front-line staff and their managers on all passenger ships should undergo disability awareness training. Persons in the Department of Transport dealing with access for people with disabilities and members of the Forum should also undergo appropriate disability awareness training.

2. The Forum to give consideration to asking the Department to employ a Disability Consultant to determine the accessibility of all passenger ships.

3. The Forum to further develop the Aide Memoirs for use by the consultants to assist them in their tasks. The consultants then use the findings from these assessments to draft guidelines for accessibility on passenger ships.

4. All passenger ship operators should be strongly encouraged to conduct self-audits on their vessels.
5. Consideration to be given by the Forum, to recommending to the Department the making available of funding, using the criteria set out by the Department, to assist owners of passenger ships to improve the facilities for people with disabilities on their vessels.

The Forum approved the Report and recommendations of the ship sub-group at its meeting in November 2007.

The current position on implementation of the recommendations of the ship sub-group is set out in Chapter 6 of this Report.
Chapter 5  Port Sub-Group

As previously mentioned, the Forum, at its first meeting in March 2007 established the “port sub-group” and provided it with terms of reference which are contained in the port sub-group report at Appendix 2.

The representatives of service providers, disability bodies and Government Departments were invited to participate on the group.

The group had its first meeting in August 2007 and met on a number of occasions in 2007 and 2008.

The Department of Transport’s Sectoral Plan makes three specific commitments with regard to the four international ports: Dublin, Rosslare, Cork and Dún Laoghaire. The vast majority of maritime transport passengers use these four ports.

1. Each port is required to carry out an independent accessibility audit of the passenger facilities and to finalise an action plan, with clear, realistic, tangible and time-bound targets for achieving any required improvements, within three months of the completion of the audit.

2. Each port is required to appoint a senior official with specific responsibility for transport accessibility matters.

3. Each port is required to encourage other service providers within their harbour areas to ensure that passenger services provided by them are accessible, as far as practicable, to people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments.

Customer Experience
The ports sub-group did not undertake customer experience trips, however, a number of customer experience trips were carried out by the ship sub-group as part of its assessment of passenger ships. Their findings included a “snap-shot” assessment of facilities available on international and domestic passenger ferry terminals (see ship sub-group report at Appendix 1).

Port Sub-Group Recommendations
When the work of the port sub-group concluded, the following seven recommendations were made in its report back to the Forum:
Recommendations

1. All front-line staff and their managers at all ports and harbours that have passenger traffic should undergo disability awareness training.

2. If the Department of Transport decides to appoint a consultant to determine the accessibility of all passenger ships then the contract should include the accessibility at ports and harbours.

3. In addition to the four International ports that are obliged to carry out an accessibility audit, other ports and harbours should be strongly encouraged to conduct self-audits on their facilities and look at any remedial work that needs to be conducted.

4. In addition to the funding available from the Department of Transport consideration should be given by the Forum, to recommending to the other relevant Departments the making available of grants to assist ports and harbours undertake any remedial work necessary to improve the facilities for people with disabilities at their ports/harbours.

5. The four International ports should update the Department of Transport on progress made on their action plan on a quarterly basis.

6. Consideration should be given to drawing up recommended accessibility guidelines for Maritime Transport Operators, both port and ferry operators, similar to guidelines that have already been formalised for Public Transport Operators in Ireland.

7. This sub-group report should form the basis of the input on ports for the Review of Sectoral Plan for Accessible Transport under the Disability Act 2005, due to be published in 2008.

The Forum approved the Report and recommendations of the port sub-group at its meeting in April 2008.

The current position on the implementation of the recommendations of the port sub-group is set out in Chapter 6 of this Report.
Chapter 6  Implementation to Date of the Recommendations of the Sub-Groups

Port Sub-Group
As outlined in Chapter 5, the port sub-group made seven recommendations.

Since the port sub-group report was finalised, progress had been made in many areas as follows:

- **Port of Cork** is acting on the recommendations of its access audits and has a number of projects lined up over a period of three years as a result of the access audit of Ringaskiddy ferry terminal. The Department of Transport has approved €39,120 in funding for these projects. The funding also covers training of port staff at the ferry terminal.

- Following the completion of accessibility audits in the Passenger Terminals and the completion of the appropriate procurement/tender process, **Dublin Port Company** has appointed a main contractor for accessibility improvement works in Terminals 1 & 2. Works commenced in October 2008 and will be completed by end 2008.

  The scope of works has been designed as far as possible to provide full accessibility for people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments, using approved standards for international best practice.

  Prior to completing the scope of the works, Dublin Port Company consulted with representatives of disability groups, by way of a presentation, on the Company’s plans in relation to the above and on the Company’s obligations under the Disability Act 2005 in general. The presentation took place at the offices of the National Disability Authority in May 2008. Arising from this presentation, the Company amended the specification of works relating to the terminals to take into account relevant observations and comments made by participants during the presentation.

- **In Rosslare Harbour** plans have been drawn up to improve accessibility. Funding has been approved by the Department of Transport and work is set to be completed in 2008. The main work to be carried out is the installation of a lift shaft with some ancillary works being carried out at the same time.

- **Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company** is drawing up an action plan on foot of its access audit.
The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has approved funding for the implementation of the main priorities identified in their access audits of the six fishery harbour centres. The report of the audits are currently with their engineers who have prepared a schedule of works. Work commenced in some of the harbours in April 2008 and will be ongoing in all harbours throughout 2008. Further funding will be applied for in 2009.

In addition, the recommendations that the disability consultant appointed by the Department of Transport should also cover the accessibility at ports and harbours, and that the sub-group report should form the basis of the input on ports for the Department’s Review of its Sectoral Plan for Accessible Transport under the Disability Act 2005, have also been implemented.

The Department is following up on the other recommendations of the sub-group and will provide progress reports to the Forum as necessary.

**Ship Sub-Group**

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, the ship sub-group made five recommendations. Two of the key recommendations were for all passenger ship operators and crew to undergo disability awareness training and the engagement by the Department of Transport of a disability consultant to conduct access audits of passenger ships. Information on progress to date on these two matters is provided below.

**Disability Awareness Training**

The purpose of the training is to provide passenger ship operators and their staff with an understanding of their obligations towards people with disabilities and older people under relevant legislation, and how they can meet these at an operational level having regard to the particular circumstances in which they operate.

Following on from the ship sub-group’s recommendation, and as a means of encouraging passenger ship operators and their crews to undertake disability awareness training, the Department of Transport provided funding to host a limited number of courses open to all domestic passenger ship operators and their crews.

The Consortium Group (which consists of the Irish Wheelchair Association, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland and DeafHear) won the tender competition for the provision of the training. The training programme developed by the Consortium Group covers accessibility issues for people with physical and sensory disabilities in greatest depth, but also raises awareness of “hidden disabilities” such as epilepsy, dyslexia, learning disabilities and mental health problems. The training was tailored specifically for the target group (small ferry operators) after detailed discussion with the Department.
The first training sessions took place in Galway on 21 and 22 November 2007.

Due to the high demand and positive response to the initial training sessions, the Department decided to provide more training in other locations in 2008. The Consortium Group conducted training courses in Killarney on 22 April 2008 and in Letterkenny on 16 October 2008.

To date, approximately 70 operators and crew of passenger ships have received disability awareness training.

In addition, it is now a condition of all new island life-line ferry service contracts awarded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaelteacht Affairs that operators and crews undertake disability awareness training.

Engagement of a Disability Consultant

While the recommendation of the ship sub-group was to engage a consultant to determine the accessibility on all passenger ships, the Department of Transport with the agreement of the Forum, decided that in view of the number of ships involved, approximately 100, and the timeframe to conduct the audits, it would not be feasible to carry out an access audit on all of the passenger ships. It was decided to identify passenger ships which are representative of the types of vessels providing services and to concentrate on domestic passenger ships of which there are a greater number and about which we have the least information. On foot of a recommendation of the port sub-group, it was decided that the consultants should also examine the harbours/landing places to and from which the selected passenger ships operate.

It was envisaged that this would provide the Department with an assessment of access to the maritime passenger services currently being provided by such ships/harbours/landing places, and to identify improvements which can be undertaken in the short-term and the medium to long-term.

For the purpose of the assessment, the vessels were grouped taking account of their size, services provided and areas of operation so that a representative selection of vessels could be identified for assessment by the selected tenderer.

The Department went to tender for the disability consultant on 17 January 2008. The contract was awarded to Configure Limited and work commenced on 27 March 2008.

The general scope of the project was to assess the selected passenger ships and the landing places to and from which they operate for disabled access for all aspects of the customer experience such as:
Embarking and disembarking

Relevant harbour facilities (ticket office, parking for people with disabilities etc)

On board facilities and information, including pre-journey information

In addition disability awareness of operator staff was assessed.

Configure undertook audits of 19 passenger vessels in 10 areas across the country. A report of the findings was received in the Department at the end of June 2008.

Consultant’s Report

Configure’s disability access auditing and reporting process has allowed the Department to:

- View a cross section of the accessibility of the country’s passenger ships.
- Establish a base line from which to encourage improvements in disability access where possible.
- Gather best practice examples in certain locations that can be shared with other operators to encourage similar application.
- Identify simple solutions that can be efficiently deployed by operators to improve disability access.

Main Findings and Recommendations of the Consultant’s Report

Positive aspects of accessibility were observed during the audit process. These applications of best practice were observed in some locations as follows:

- Accessible boarding methods
- Designated safe pathways
- Portable ramp
- Platform lift

The four greatest barriers to access found during the audits were as follows:

1. Lack of colour contrasting bands to handrails, steps and trip hazards on the decks.
2. Trip hazards identified on the decks.
3. Pre-journey information (website information, advertising material).
4. Signage that was difficult to read.
Configure recommends that these barriers can be overcome by simple cost effective measures such as:

- **Colour contrast** - including colour contrast to staircases, ramps, steps at doorways, trip hazards on decks and seating.

- **Removing trip hazards** - including improving surface conditions, non slip surfaces and removing temporary obstructions.

- **Improving pre-journey information** - including both website and associated advertising material.

- **Signage** - improve colour contrast, font, letter size, reflective glass surfaces and provide more way finding and information signage.
Chapter 7  Conclusions and Recommendations

All the stakeholders on the Forum worked together in a spirit of co-operation and with the shared agenda of removing unnecessary barriers to access for people with disabilities to maritime passenger transport services.

From the outset of the work of the Forum, representatives of the service providers stated their desire to provide the best travelling experience to all passengers.

Representatives of people with disabilities, for their part, acknowledged that it would not be possible to make all vessels and ports fully accessible overnight and that progress would take time.

Due to the diversity and scale of services provided by maritime passenger operators, the Forum recognises that expectation of facilities provided for passengers, not just those with a disability, must be realistic. What is reasonable to expect at a large port or on an international ferry cannot be expected at a small harbour/pier or on vessels plying short domestic voyages.

Accessibility is increasingly recognised as a key element of a high-quality, efficient and sustainable transport system. All users benefit from easier access to all modes of public transport.

There are economic and social reasons why operators should improve the accessibility of their services. Improving accessibility makes good business sense as the profile of passengers is changing with an ageing population and improved access makes travelling easier for everyone.

Universal design is fundamental to increasing accessibility. Universal design aims to provide a design which is accessible to, usable by and appealing to as many people as possible. The benefits to adopting a universal design approach vary from increases in potential markets to increased customer service.

Universal design can increase market reach. Not only could a service become available to an increased number of potential customers, but also to a wider range of potential customers. If a service is as usable as possible to as many people as possible, customers will get more enjoyment from accessing and using it. A satisfied customer will tell others about the service potentially creating new customers.
People are increasingly more confident to speak up when they have a complaint and information and communication technologies (ICT) have made this increasingly easier to do. Direct pressure from consumer groups as well as direct engagement with their customers have encouraged many companies to evolve their design process and improve their customer services to accommodate a wider range of people. Universal Design enables companies to design products and services that more closely match consumer expectations and needs.

It is very important that in making improvements for people with disabilities we keep in mind the whole travel chain. Many journeys involve using more than one transport mode. Therefore, the overall objective of creating accessible transport services should be to develop a system through which people with disabilities can access, travel on and interchange between modes easily and safely. That system starts with providing good access to information about services to all.

**Challenges**
The Forum recognised early on that its Terms of Reference were going to be very challenging given the short timeframe for a report to be prepared. Amongst the issues which made it challenging were:

- the lack of information available on current levels of access particularly on domestic passenger ships to identify where improvements are needed
- the diversity and disparate nature of the sector
- the unique features of passenger ships and physical features of harbours
- existing vessels

**Level of Accessibility**
To address the first of these challenges the Forum agreed with the recommendation of the ship sub-group that the Department of Transport engage a consultant to carry out access audits on passenger ships and the harbours/landing places to and from which they operate. This was considered essential to get an overview of the current level of access on domestic passenger ships and to identify where improvements need to be made. The Forum is very pleased that the Department acted on this recommendation in such a timely manner.

The Forum recommends that the Department use the findings of Configure’s report to develop an action plan to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.
Diversity of the Sector
The diverse and disparate nature of the sector and the dispersal of responsibility for ports/harbours between a number of Departments and local authorities and the lack of a national organisation representing all passenger ship operators, meant that it has been very challenging to engage all the service providers in the work of the Forum.

A number of avenues were used to overcome this. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government who have responsibility for local authorities, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who have responsibility for fishery harbours, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs who award contracts for ferry services to offshore islands, were all represented on the Forum. Three of the international ferry companies were members of the Forum and the Irish Passenger Boat and Ferry Operators Association was also invited to be represented on the Forum and they were kept informed of developments at the Forum. Individual letters and notices were also issued to licensed operators keeping them apprised of developments.

The carrying out of the access audits by the Consultant should also create awareness amongst operators. However, it is the funding and roll out of the Disability Awareness Training which it is envisaged should have the greatest impact in terms of raising awareness and engagement.

In line with the recommendations of the two sub-groups, it is recommended that individual vessel operators and port/harbour authorities conduct self audits of their vessels and ports/harbours.

The Forum further recommends that the Department consider developing a ‘template/checklist’ for both vessel operators and port/harbour authorities to assist them in conducting self audits.

Unique Features of Passenger Ships and Harbours
Unlike other transport modes, such as aircraft, trains and buses where there are limited vehicle designs, passenger ships are, in most cases, individually designed and there is a diversity of vessels involved from large to medium sized passenger ships serving offshore islands, and small vessels plying short voyages on inshore waters and lakes. This creates challenges in terms of developing guidelines or standards for accessibility.

The limited size of some of the vessels in use and the geographical and physical nature of certain harbours serving passenger ships means that full accessibility will not be possible. However, the Forum agrees that what is essential in those situations is the provision of information by service providers on the accessibility or otherwise of their services. The Forum therefore recommends that vessel operators and port/harbour
authorities provide information on their accessible facilities through their websites and information literature, to enable people with disabilities to make informed decisions before undertaking journeys.

The Forum recommends that, in the short term, the Department of Transport in conjunction with the National Disability Authority draft general guidelines, to assist and support maritime passenger transport service operators in making their services more accessible to passengers with disabilities, in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The Forum further recommends that the Department of Transport provide links from its website to other websites providing up to date information on service improvements in the industry.

Existing Vessels
Again, unlike other transport modes, vessels have a long lifespan often up to 30 years plus. This means that the existing stock of vessels contains many older ships. The scope for major physical alterations to existing vessels is limited due to the design and safety features involved. That however, should not be read as meaning that there is nothing which can be done to improve accessibility for passengers. There are a number of areas in which improvements can be made, examples being signage, lighting, handrails, tactile surfaces and these have been highlighted in the Consultant’s report.

The Forum recommends that the Department of Transport consider funding suitable projects which will provide simple but effective improvements on existing vessels based on the findings of Configure’s report.

Disability Awareness Training
The point was strongly made by those representing people with disabilities that disability awareness training for all those involved in providing maritime passenger transport services is critical. Even where physical infrastructure is accessible if those operating it are not properly trained, then it can make life very difficult for persons with disabilities to access.

Due to the consensus amongst all the stakeholders on the Forum of the importance of disability awareness training, funding and providing a training programme for domestic passenger ship operators was given priority by the Department of Transport and rolled out ahead of the Forum’s report.

The Forum is also conscious however that, like training in other areas such as safety, a commitment to training is an ongoing process and new staff and changes in staff will require that disability training becomes an integral part of the training of staff providing
maritime passenger transport services. Once the current Department of Transport programme of disability awareness training for operators is completed, it will be the responsibility of owners and operators of passenger ships to ensure that appropriate and ongoing disability awareness training is provided to crew, management and staff.

The Forum is very pleased and encouraged by the take up and feedback from the training conducted so far and recommends that the Department of Transport provide two more disability awareness training courses in other locations around the country in 2009.

Standards
New vessels should be built to the highest possible standards and existing vessels improved as far as practicable.

The Forum was made aware of the Department of Transport’s proposals to introduce primary legislation to enhance the Minister’s powers to make regulations with regard to accessibility on domestic passenger ships and to introduce Codes of Practice. The Forum acknowledges that due to the fact that passenger ships are generally built to individual design it is more difficult to provide for prescriptive standards. For that reason it has recommended earlier in this report that the Department of Transport prepare general guidelines for operators in the short term.

In the medium to longer term the Forum recommends that the Department draft more comprehensive guidelines or Codes of Practice, in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Ports and harbours are required to comply with existing standards and guidelines which apply to publicly accessible buildings. In particular, Part M of the Building Regulations and the National Disability Authority guidelines, most specifically the ‘Building for Everyone’ publication are already applicable to ports and harbours.

Monitoring Implementation
The Forum recognises that its report and recommendations are really just the start of the process for improving access on maritime passenger transport services. There is a lot of work yet to be done and responsibility for the improvements required both on ships and at ports falls to a wide range of people. Service providers themselves have the key role to play but the relevant Government Departments and agencies also have important roles to play.

It is therefore important that there is a structure and mechanism in place to both monitor progress on a cross-cutting basis but also to contribute to developing and advising on further proposals for improvements.
The Forum therefore recommends that the Department of Transport maintain the Forum in place for this purpose.

The Forum recommends that an annual meeting of industry representatives be held as a useful way of sharing knowledge and experiences of accessibility improvements and development. The Forum would be prepared to organise such a meeting.
Bibliography

Publications:


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Audio-Visual:
Appendix 1
Report of The Ship Sub-Group

Background to the Establishment of the Ship Sub-Group
One of the key provisions of the maritime passenger transport section of the Sectoral Plan is the establishment of the Maritime Passenger Transport Forum to oversee the implementation of that section of the Plan. The Forum comprises representatives of Government Departments, port authorities, passenger ship operators, the National Disability Authority and organisations representing people with disabilities.

At the first meeting of the Forum on 12 March 2007, it was decided to have two sub-groups, one to deal with land based access (port sub-group) and one to deal with ship access (ship sub-group). The remit of the ship sub-group was to assess accessibility on board passenger ships, from booking a journey to exiting the ship at the end of the journey.

Membership of the Ship Sub-Group
The group consisted of representatives of service providers, disability bodies and Government Departments as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Taylor</td>
<td>(Chairman) Maritime Safety Directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorraine McGurk</td>
<td>(Secretary) Maritime Safety Directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Conway</td>
<td>Maritime Safety Directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Markey</td>
<td>Irish Ferries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Hughes</td>
<td>Stena Line</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colin Fleming</td>
<td>P &amp; O Irish Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desmond Kenny</td>
<td>National Council for the Blind in Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malachy Foots</td>
<td>People with Disabilities in Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mick Costello</td>
<td>Irish Hard of Hearing Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Luskin</td>
<td>Irish Passenger Boat and Ferry Operator’s Assoc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aodhán MacCormaic</td>
<td>Dept of Community Rural &amp; Gaelteacht Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donie O’Shea</td>
<td>National Disability Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Barry</td>
<td>Irish Wheelchair Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Waldek</td>
<td>Inclusion Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eamon Kane</td>
<td>National Council on Ageing &amp; Older People</td>
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Terms of Reference of the Ship Sub-Group

To identify the key accessibility standards that need to be in place to facilitate travel on passenger ships by people with mobility, cognitive and sensory impairments.

Such standards, would include:

- Travel booking facilities
- Disability awareness for crews
- Ship construction and fittings

Account to be taken of the different types of passenger vessels, including international ferries, passenger ships serving offshore islands and other services such as the tourism sector.

To begin the process of assessing the extent to which such standards are achieved particularly for international ferries and the principal scheduled services to offshore islands.

To make proposals for a programme of assessment of standards in place on all other passenger vessels.


Note: Key accessibility standards should take into account best practice in Ireland and abroad, in particular the UK, to where the majority of international ferries operate from Ireland.

Customer Experience Trips

A number of customer experience trips were carried out by the ship sub-group as part of its assessment of passenger ships. These trips produced a “snap-shot” assessment of facilities available on passenger ships. The findings are not exhaustive.

International Passenger Ferries

At the first meeting of the ship sub-group on 2 April 2007, it was agreed that a customer experience trip would be arranged. The trip would incorporate looking at the accessibility of international passenger ships from a customer point of view. The vessels used for the trip were chosen as a result of the operators inviting the group to visit the ships.
Monday 23 April 2007 was chosen as the date for the trip and the itinerary was as follows:

- Meet at the Irish Ferries ticket office in Dublin Port at 07:15
- Travel from Dublin to Holyhead on the MV “Ulysses” departing at 08:05
- Breakfast served at 08:30
- Arrive at Holyhead at 11:30 am and get into allocated car to drive for lunch and then on to Stena Line for the return journey
- Board the ship “Stena Explorer” (HSS) at 14:00 to look around the ship before the rest of the passengers board
- Depart Holyhead 15:30
- Arrive Dún Laoghaire 17:30

Several members of the ship sub-group participated in the customer experience trip, which also included nominated members of the disability bodies.

Left-right Niall McDonnell, Anne Waldek, Alan Markey, Paul Alford, Freda Keenan, Helen Conway, Victoria Hughes, Clare Whelan and Jagger, Sheila Gleson, Lorraine McGurk, Nábla Kane and Eamon Kane
The group included representatives of people who are hard of hearing, are vision impaired, are wheelchair users, are older people and are people who have mild learning disabilities.

The day started off with the group gathering at the Irish Ferries Terminal in Dublin Port, to catch the Irish Ferries “Ulysses” 08:05 sailing to Holyhead. The booking was for four cars to carry twelve passengers plus one assistance dog on board.

We drove on to the car deck and made our way via lifts and stairs in order to examine all available accessibility to the passenger decks.

Once on board the group members were given a matrix of appropriate and practical measures to help them assess the vessel from the point of view of:

- Pre-travel (booking)
- Arriving at the ship
- Embarking the ship
- Onboard (circulation)
- Disembarking the ship

taking into account information systems, physical environment and personal interface (see Annex A of the ship sub-group report).

The group assessed the facilities on the vessel and met up again to be given a tour of the cabins.

Following on from this the group returned to the car deck to disembark the ship.

After lunch the group made their way to the Stena Line Ferry Terminal and embarked the Stena Line “HSS Explorer” Ferry to Dún Laoghaire, again all the group members were car passengers and following arrival at the car deck made their way to the passenger decks again via lifts and stairs in order to examine all available means of accessibility.

The group assessed the facilities on the vessel and at the end of the voyage once again returned to the car deck to disembark the ship.

**Findings of the Group following Customer Experience Trip**

The ship sub-group correlated the findings from the customer experience trip and these findings are detailed below. In general, accessibility and facilities onboard were very good and the staff were very helpful. There were some minor issues, which if corrected would prove very beneficial and add to the accessibility of passenger ships. Many of these issues can be resolved without significant expenditure or resources.
Booking/Websites

- The websites were very user friendly and timetables, prices and other relevant information could be easily accessed.

- The websites could benefit from an option to enlarge the text to provide better access for those with visual impairments.

- Telephone bookings also worked well and staff have been able to deal with queries from those with disabilities.

Terminal

- The directional signage on the way to the ship in Dublin was poor.

- The paving and ramped access in the Dublin terminal wasn’t as good as it could have been.

- Whilst the paving in the Holyhead terminal was very good in general, parts of the paving outside the terminal were cobbled which can prove difficult for chair users.

- The counters were too high for chair users.

- It was difficult to find the gent’s toilet in the Dublin terminal, the sign could be more prominent.

- Café in Dublin terminal does not have access for chair users.

Embarkation/Car Decks

- Wheelchairs were available on one of the vessels for use by passengers at car deck level which was an excellent facility.

- The wide lanes are good for wheelchair access, however, those directing the cars to their positions on the car deck were directing them to the centre of the space. The majority of the space is needed on the side of the car the person with the mobility impairment will be using to exit it.

- The ramp from the deck to the floor level at the elevator was very good and staff were very helpful.

- There were trip hazards and unevenness in parts of the car deck that made wheelchair access a little difficult.
Lifts

- The controls were at the correct level, including the emergency controls.

- The lift for the car deck was switched off, on one of the vessels, before all mobility impaired people were back on the car deck to disembark.

- On one of the vessels, the lifts to the premier area and restaurant could only be accessed with the assistance of a member of staff.

- Where customers were accompanied by staff the lifts were very effective.

  ![Lift button Panel](image1)

  ![Lift](image2)

Where passengers were not accompanied

- There was no Braille on the lift controls which may cause difficulties for the visually impaired.

- It was difficult to ascertain what floor you were on if you were visually or aurally impaired.

- When at the lifts on the car decks, it was difficult to aurally ascertain what deck, the passenger facilities were on.

- It was difficult for wheelchair users to safely turn after entering a lift as they could not see who or what was behind them.
Passenger Decks – General

- The circulation on the ships was good with plenty of space and good corridor space throughout.

- The furnishing throughout was very user friendly.

- On one vessel, there was a minimal amount of wheelchair accessible area with the seating removed.

- Onboard accommodation, where available, was of a very high standard.
Floors, walls and passenger obstructions such as poles, lamp stands, barriers, etc. are hard to distinguish from one another if they are the same or similar colour when you are partially sighted.

The directional low location lighting could be a bit misleading directing chair users to steps.

Hand rails along walls and stairs were plentiful but all in chrome which provided less contrast near glass panels and grey surfaces.

The height of the risers in the steps from one deck to another was a bit high.

Some of the steps on one of the vessels did not have sufficient warning strips as a result there is no discernable edge when descending them.

Ship Announcements

Ship announcements were not always clear which made it difficult to understand their content.

When the safety instructions are announced it would be very beneficial to a person who is hard of hearing, if the instructions were shown on the television screens at the same time.

The announcement text, where available, on the TV screens was difficult to read (text was too small).

There was only one announcement made for all passengers to return to the car deck. Two announcements would be more desirable, the first one to direct people with disabilities back to their cars as they may need more time to get to their vehicles.

An additional announcement warning passengers with disabilities of rough conditions should be made on high-speed vessels, as they would have great difficulty moving around in unstable conditions.
Signage

- In general, signage was good.
- The disabled toilet was difficult to locate as there were insufficient signs to point you in the right direction.
- Some of the text on the signage was difficult to read (e.g. lifejacket information) as the font was too small.

Example of Signage

Toilets

- The toilet facilities for people with disabilities were very good, very well laid out with plenty of space for chair users.
- Only two accessible toilets on the ship neither on the upper passenger deck.
- Main toilet facilities were not easy to access due to sills on the floors at the entrance doors.
- Signage on toilet doors warning of the presence of the sill was not noticeable as it was too small.
- It would be useful to have the signage warning of the presence of the sill at the entrance to the toilet on both sides of the doors.
- There were no handles/railings at toilet doors to steady and aid persons opening sprung and dampened doors.
There were insufficient railings or handles inside toilets for support while the ship is rolling.

There were no hand rails outside the ladies and gents toilets to aid older passengers.

**Shops/Restaurants/Cinemas**
- Access to the restaurant was very good.
- Shop staff were helpful.
- Bar area was also easy to access.
- The shop layout was difficult for people with visual impairments to navigate.
- There are no safety railings in the shop.
- Cinema was well laid out and easily accessible, however there is no designated space for chair users.
- The cinema would benefit from a lower level counter, a loop system and from films being shown having subtitles.

**Premier Area and Relaxation Area**
- Access was, in general, very good and staff were very helpful.
- The relaxation area could benefit from some wheelchair accessible bays in order that someone accompanying a chair user could remain with them.
- The top of the stairs in the relaxation area would benefit from a better warning strip to discern its edge.

**Training**
- The group are aware that disability awareness training is currently ongoing for staff on these vessels. Staff who have disability awareness training are better equipped to assist people with disabilities.

**Domestic Passenger Vessels**
On 22 May, members of the ship sub-group accompanied by Tom King, nominee of the Irish Passenger Boat and Ferry Operators Association travelled to Ros an Mhíl to assess the disability access on the vessels operating between that port and the Aran Islands.
The port was chosen due to the large volume of people using these services annually (approx 300,000).

The group took the 13.00 ferries from Ros an Mhíl to Árainn. Three members of the group travelled on the “Ceol na Farraige” and two members of the group travelled on the “Clan na nOileáinn”. Again, the vessels were assessed to ascertain the facilities that are in place from the point of view of:

- Pre-travel (booking)
- Arriving at the ship
- Embarking the ship
- Onboard (circulation)
- Disembarking the ship

The groups assessed the facilities on the vessels and following on from this, the group disembarked at Árainn.

After lunch the group made their way back to the pier and made the return journey at 17.00 to Ros an Mhíl having changed to the vessel that they did not travel on that morning. Again the groups assessed the facilities available on the vessels and disembarked at Ros an Mhíl.

Following on from this members of the group assessed, in as far as possible, the following vessels which were alongside at Ros an Mhíl:

- Banríon Connemara
- Banríon na Farraige
- Draíocht na Farraige
- Clan Eagle 1

**Findings of the Group following Customer Experience Trip**

In general, the findings were that the disability access was reasonably good in some areas but would benefit from improvement in other areas. Many of the issues in these areas would be relatively easy to resolve with simple and inexpensive solutions. The findings are detailed below.

**Booking/Websites**

- There was insufficient information available on the websites for people with disabilities.
- The information that was available was not easy to locate (information was one of the FAQs on the website).
The information that was available was for chair users only and was misleading, given that they would need assistance to get on and off the vessels. This was not stated in the information given.

The website could benefit from an option to enlarge the text to provide better access for those with visual impairments.

Terminal - Ros an Mhil

Parking: disabled spaces provided (3 in staff car parking adjacent to terminal - additional in public parking areas).

Access from parking areas to terminal was good with no steps. However one ticket office had a step outside which would hinder a chair user or person with mobility impairment. Height of counters and serving areas is important when making access available for chair users.

Signage at the terminal was good. Toilet facilities for people with disabilities were available at the terminal site, however use of this facility was hindered due to the door opening direction and size of the toilet space.

Staff were found to be very helpful and attentive
Embarkation – Ros an Mhíl

- From the terminal to the embarkation points for all ships was a short walk over level ground. The co-use of this area by vehicles delivering to ships is a problem and may give rise to safety issues.

- The embarkation on all ships was found to present problems to all people with mobility impairment. Embarkation is hindered by the fact that access is from a solid pier to the vessels that were subject to a tidal range of about 3 meters. This resulted in loading on the upper deck on many occasions rather than to the designed loading areas on the main deck of vessels. The facilities for people with disabilities and most refreshment areas on all vessels were situated on the main decks.

- In areas where embarkation is not from floating pontoons, the angle of the embarkation ramps will always present a problem.

Embarkation – Árainn

- The same issues applied with regards to the solid pier.

- However, the pier surface/walkway to the main road was very rough which would pose a difficulty for chair users.

- The use of the pier as a working area for fishing vessels and loading/unloading operations, e.g. the use of fork lifts and lorries, creates safety risks.
Lifts

- Only one vessel was fitted with a lift this being the newest vessel and built under Council Directive 98/18/EC. We were assured by staff that anyone using this lift was accompanied. The lift was used only when the vessel was alongside.

- Movement between decks on all other vessels was an issue for chair users and people with reduced mobility.

Passenger Decks

- The circulation on the vessels was generally adequate.

- The use of contrasting colours on furnishing, structural poles, etc., would greatly enhance the facilities for people with visual impairment.

- None of the vessels had dedicated wheelchair spaces in the seating area.

- Additional hand holds and grabs rails would greatly assist mobility on all vessels.

- Stairs and ladders present a problem for disability access. This could be greatly enhanced by having highly visible nosing strips and closed threads on all stairs to assist all people with mobility/sensory impairments.

- Any areas where trip or bumping of head hazards exist should be clearly marked and protected with adequate ramps/cushioning and warnings.
On certain vessels, the placement of bins on walkways in seating areas can cause an obstruction for chair users.

**Ship Announcements**

- On one vessel there were excellent audio and visual safety announcements in the main deck saloon. The announcements were clear with additional on-screen sign language and good visual demonstrations. All vessels would benefit from having this type of a facility in all areas.
- All information dissemination should be available in fully accessible formats.

**Signage**

- Signage in general was good. All passengers would benefit if vessels had larger appropriate text on signage.
- Text fonts and colours can greatly improve legibility of signage.

**Toilets**

- In general, vessels provided toilet facilities suitable for people with disabilities.
- Toilets on all vessels would benefit from hand rails outside their doors.

**Service Areas**

- In general, access on most vessels was good.
- The service would benefit from clear signage and low counters.
- Clearer colour co-ordination would also be beneficial.
Training
Whilst all staff were very helpful and attentive, it was felt that staff would benefit from disability awareness training.

Conclusion
Notwithstanding the limited time-frame and the resources of the ship sub-group, two customer experience trips were carried out and the findings were recorded. Following on from this the group decided to produce two draft Aide Memoirs (Annexes B and C) one for small passenger ships and another one for large passenger ships. The two Aide Memoirs were developed with different expectations in mind, it would not be feasible for example for a small passenger ship to have a restaurant or large shop on board. The group feel these draft Aide Memoirs could serve a dual purpose, i.e. to be used by ship operators as a check-list of the facilities available on their vessel. It could then, in turn be used by customers to assist them when they are organising a trip by showing them the accessibility of the vessels. The Aide Memoirs are still in draft form as one of the recommendations of the sub-group is that the Forum further develops them (see recommendation 3).

Recommendations
1. All front-line staff and their managers on all passenger ships should undergo disability awareness training. Persons in the Department dealing with access for people with disabilities and members of the Forum to undergo appropriate disability awareness training.

2. The Forum to give consideration to asking the Department to employ a Disability Consultant to determine the accessibility of all passenger ships using this report, the matrix at (Annex A, of this report ) and the Aide Memoirs (see Annexes B and C of this report) as a basis for the assessments.

3. The Forum to further develop the Aide Memoirs for use by the consultants to assist them in their tasks. The consultants then use the findings from these assessments to draft guidelines for accessibility on passenger ships.

4. All passenger ships should be strongly encouraged to conduct self audits on their vessels.

5. Consideration to be given by the Forum, to recommending to the Department the making available of funding under the Disability Act 2005, using the criteria set out by the Department, to assist owners of passenger ships to improve the facilities for people with disabilities on their vessels.
Acknowledgements

The ship sub-group would like to thank the following for their assistance and input into the drafting of this report:

- Niall McDonnell, Irish Wheelchair Association, Paul Alford, Inclusion Ireland, Freda Keenan, Irish Hard of Hearing Association, Clare Whelan, National Council for the Blind of Ireland and Nábla Kane, National Council on Ageing and Older People who gave up their time to participate in the International Customer Experience Trip.

- Irish Ferries who accommodated those involved in the Customer Experience Trip on the MV Ulysses on its Dublin to Holyhead crossing.

- Stena Line who accommodated those involved in the Customer Experience Trip on the Stena Explorer on its Holyhead to Dún Laoghaire crossing.

- Island Ferries and Aran Direct for their co-operation and facilitation during the Domestic Customer Experience Trip.
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Annex B

Working Document

Aide memoir for operators conducting assessment of larger ferry operations for disability accessibility

Information systems

Pre-travel & booking
- ensure website is accessible to all (W3C/WAI checkpoint levels AAA or similar). If configured with special disability section, all facilities should flow naturally from this section e.g. booking, complaints, etc;
- make information important to people with disabilities prominent on website – do not hide “no lift” or similar information deep in booking procedure or in “terms and conditions”;
- request, but do not demand, prior notification of person’s special needs and ensure that, when provided, the information is correctly handled and passed to appropriate front line staff both ashore and on board;
- try to provide “whole of journey” information useful to persons with disabilities – car parking facilities, courtesy bus, terminal layout, walkways, toilet facilities, facilities for assistance dogs - including relief areas, difficulties such as long walks to ship, etc.

Arrival at the ship and on board during journey
- having induction loop systems at check-in and reception will greatly help people with hearing impairment;
- braille and other accessible text forms should be available to those who require them;
- audible and visual means of information dissemination should be considered a minimum acceptable level;
- inform passengers of contact points/officers on journey and whereabouts and format of available information;
- information systems and notices, including illuminated and variable message displays should be disability proofed;
restaurant facilities – signage and menus in accessible format?

service lifts and escalators to and from vehicle and passenger decks – are they compliant with disability access? Do they serve all passenger levels – if not is this made clear? Are there personnel available to accompany those that need an augmented level of support?

public address systems on car decks are often very hard to hear due to high ambient noise – at disability designated areas, consider visual as well as audio (with loop system).

Disembarkation

advance notice required – those needing more time or extra assistance allowed to car decks first;

arrangements at terminal of disembarkation, including options for onward travel;

details of any known practical difficulties or physical obstacles at the terminal of disembarkation;

is there a seamless process of handing over responsibility for providing the needs of people with disabilities from shore to ship and vice versa.

Physical environment

identification of where a disabled person is sitting in car or vehicle may help when being parked on car deck in leaving sufficient room for the safe and comfortable exit;

is foot passenger access step free? Can wheelchairs access the ship via skywalk system?

wheelchair-accessible toilets and baby changing facilities provided?

wheelchair-accessible cabins – number and configuration;

wheelchair availability – size and usage consideration;

facilities for assistance dogs, including any relief areas;

avoidance of lashing points on disability designated parking areas of car decks – if lashing points are mandatory, consideration should be given to fitting of flush fitting units and/or very clear marking;
• Lifts should be fitted with a mirror fitted with lower edge at minimum 300 mm from floor on back wall to aid safe wheelchair manoeuvring and aid seeing floor indication;

• Lifts should have at least one hand rail at side, on larger lifts this should be extended to both sides and back if appropriate;

• Audible and visual feedback must be provided in lift with controls fitted with Braille buttons;

• Contrasting colours for walkways, walls, doors and any obstructions such as structural poles, members, etc is essential for the safety and comfort of those with visual impairment;

• Shop layout can often be very confusing and difficult to navigate for people with disabilities – this may be due to attempts to maximise exposure of display units but putting them in walkways, etc. It would help if at least one “free flow” path could be made available and clearly marked to include most commonly purchased items;

• Many doors on ships are necessarily of heavy construction and have closing springs and dampers – the opening of these doors by people with disabilities may be very difficult. Powered doors are better and easier to operate for people with disabilities. Extra handles fitted, on both internal and external sides, in proximity to these doors will significantly help with their safe usage especially when the ship is pitching or rolling;

• The fit out of all toilets should be made as accessible as possible within space and operational constraints. Many elderly people and people with mild disability may prefer to use “normal” toilets but sometimes find such ships toilets difficult to use with cramped conditions, trip hazards at doors, heavy doors and lack of hold-on handles. Toilets on ships often lack clearly marked furniture/fittings in contrasting colours and this may be exacerbated by wall & ceiling coverings with excessively reflecting surfaces and strong glare from over-bright lighting;

• Steps and stairs – colours of steps, nosings, handrails, sidewalls, should all be carefully chosen to give maximum help to people with impaired vision. Corrugated or corduroy warning strips should be fitted at top and bottom of stairs.
Personal interface

- do all front line staff both on shore and on board have training in disability awareness?

- are they equipped with all information about special needs given at time of booking?

- do they have a contingency plan if a disabled person or group turns up unannounced?

- is the training of staff sufficiently robust to ensure people with disabilities receive an adequate and sensitive response to all their needs?

- do all emergency drills and procedures concerning passengers fully address the special needs of people with disabilities?
Annex C

Working Document

Aide memoir for operators conducting assessment of smaller domestic passenger vessel operations for disability accessibility

Information systems

Pre-travel & booking

- ensure website (if you have one) is accessible to all (W3C/WAI checkpoint levels AAA or similar). If configured with special disability section, all facilities should flow naturally from this section e.g. booking, complaints, etc;

- all information should be up front, especially any information that would potentially affect the travel experience of people with disabilities;

- request, but do not demand, prior notification of person’s special needs and ensure that, when provided, the information is correctly handled and passed to appropriate front line staff both ashore and on board;

- try to provide “whole of journey” information (on website or on advertising material) useful to persons with disabilities – car parking facilities, courtesy bus, terminal layout, walkways, toilet facilities, facilities for assistance dogs - including relief areas, difficulties such as long walks to ship, etc.

Arrival at the ship and on board during journey

- consider how best to help people with sensory impairment - having induction loop systems, Braille and other accessible text formats (large print, etc), audible and visual means of information dissemination;

- inform passengers of contact points/officers on journey and whereabouts and format of available information;

- information systems and notices, including illuminated and variable message displays should be considered;

- food facilities – signage and menus in accessible format?
public address systems on vessels are often very hard to hear due to high ambient noise – give serious consideration to audio-visual formats for safety announcements and information dissemination. Limited area induction loop systems (available at modest cost) should also be considered to aid those with adapted (most) hearing aids.

Disembarkation

- those needing more time or extra assistance may be allowed to disembark first or, if impractical;
- asked to remain seated till others have left and crew/shore personnel can provide extra assistance;
- notify all passengers of arrangements at point of disembarkation, including options for onward travel;
- details of any known practical difficulties or physical obstacles at the point of disembarkation;
- is there a seamless process of handing over responsibility for providing the needs of people with disabilities from shore to ship and vice versa?

Physical environment

- is foot passenger access step free? Can wheelchairs access the ship via ramp?
- wheelchair-accessible toilets and baby changing facilities provided? If not on board are they available in embarkation and disembarkation points?
- consider spare wheelchair availability for usage in cases of reduced mobility or temporary incapacitation;
- facilities for assistance dogs, including any relief areas at terminals;
- lifts, where fitted, should be as disability proofed as possible given the constraints of such facilities on small ships;
- contrasting colours for walkways, walls, doors and any obstructions such as structural poles, structural members etc., are essential for the safety and comfort of those with visual impairments;
consider fitting extra grab handles at door accesses to aid safe opening and closing;

the fit out of non-disabled toilets should be made as disabled compliant as possible. This may be as simple as a good choice of colours and fitting of extra grab handles. Lighting is also important;

steps and stairs – colours of steps, nosings, handrails, sidewalls, should all be carefully chosen to give maximum help to people with impaired vision. Corrugated or corduroy warning strips should be fitted at top and bottom of stairs;

lips or sills on door frames should be fitted with ramps and clearly visible markings. Ramps may need to be temporary and portable.

Personal interface

do all crew and front line staff both on ship and on shore have training in disability awareness? Financial help is available from FAS for training;

are employees equipped with all information about special needs given at time of booking?

is there a contingency plan if a disabled person or group turns up unannounced?

is the training of staff sufficiently robust to ensure people with disabilities receive an adequate and sensitive response to all their needs?

do all emergency drills and procedures concerning passengers fully address the special needs of people with disabilities?
Appendix 2

Report of the Port Sub-Group

Background to the Establishment of the Port Sub-Group
One of the key provisions of the maritime passenger transport section of the Sectoral Plan is the establishment of the Maritime Passenger Transport Forum to oversee the implementation of that section of the Plan. The Forum comprises representatives of Government Departments, Port authorities, passenger ship operators, the National Disability Authority and organisations representing people with disabilities.

At the first meeting of the Forum on 12 March 2007, it was decided to have two sub-groups, one to deal with land based access (port sub-group) and one to deal with ship access (ship sub-group).

Terms of Reference of the Port Sub-Group
To identify the key accessibility standards that need to be in place on land to facilitate travel on passenger ships by people with mobility, cognitive and sensory impairments.

Such standards would include:

- Disability awareness for land based staff
- Building construction and fittings

Account should be taken of the different types of land facilities, including the four international ferryports, the land facilities for passenger services to offshore islands and other services such as the tourism sector.

To begin the process of assessing the extent to which such standards are achieved particularly for international ports and the harbours serving the principal scheduled services to offshore islands.

To make proposals for a programme of assessment of standards in place on other land facilities used by maritime passengers.
First Meeting of the Group
The ports sub-group met in August 2007 and the following action plan was decided:

1. Ascertaining what is happening now in the following relevant areas (A-D):

A comprising of:

The four international Ports will be asked to provide an update on the status of the independent accessibility audit of the passenger facilities at its port and provide an update regarding the finalising of an action plan with clear, realistic, tangible and time bound targets for achieving any required improvements.

B comprising of:

Six other Ports under the control of the Department of Transport and thirteen regional Harbour Authorities operating under the Harbours Act 1946.

Maritime Transport Division will provide an update from the appropriate sections in the Department of Transport, which are responsible for the above entities as to their progress on carrying out an audit and development of an action plan. This section includes those harbours from which services to the offshore islands are operated.

C comprising of:

Six Fishery Centres

The Maritime Transport Division will request the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to provide an update on the status of their accessibility audit covering the above and identify what remedial action is being undertaken.

D comprising of:

Large number of harbours, landing places, slipways etc. owned by local authorities

The Maritime Transport Division will request the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government to provide an update on the status of their accessibility audit covering the above (or what other system they have in place) and identify what remedial action is being undertaken.

- Sub-group to then identify the key accessibility standards, primarily from the detail contained in the audits of the four international ports and ascertain the extent to which such standards are being achieved, particularly in A above.
Sub-group to make realistic and practicable proposals and develop a time based action plan to cover areas A-D in as far as possible

Fact Finding
Letters requesting an update on the status of the independent accessibility audit of their passenger facilities were sent to the Port Companies and Harbours under the remit of the Department of Transport.

Four International Ports
- Port of Cork Company
- Dublin Port Company
- Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company
- Irish Rail – who operate Rosslare Harbour

Port Companies
- Drogheda Port Company
- Shannon/Foynes Port Company
- Galway Harbour Company
- New Ross Port Company
- Port of Waterford Company
- Dundalk Port Company
- Wicklow Port Company

Harbours
- Arklow Harbour Commissioners
- Baltimore and Skibbereen Harbour Commissioners
- Kinsale Harbour Commissioners
- Tralee and Fenit Harbour Commissioners
- Bantry Bay Harbour Commissioners
- Wexford Harbour Commissioners
- River Moy Harbour Commissioners
- Westport Port and Harbour Commissioners
- Kilrush Town Council
- Youghal Harbour Authority
Other Relevant Departments

- Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
  - A letter was also sent to the Department of Communications Energy and Natural Resources who were at that time responsible for the six Fishery Centres to ascertain the status of any independent accessibility audit of the passenger facilities at the 6 fishery centres. Responsibility for these has since moved to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
  - A letter was also sent to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to ascertain from them the status of any independent accessibility audit of the passenger facilities including landing places, slipways etc of harbours under their remit.
  
  - The Department of Transport Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005 states “There are a large number of harbours, landing places and slips owned and operated by local authorities. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is addressing these facilities in the Local Authority Plans chapter of its Sectoral Plan.”

A follow up reminder letter was also issued to those who had not replied.
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<th>Passenger Facilities Y/N</th>
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Details of Replies

International Ports

Dublin Port:
Dublin Port Company has undertaken Access Audits on Passenger Terminals 1, 2 and 3.

Consultants produced a combined Access Audit Report which identifies and categorises works/retrofits etc., considered to meet the categories outlined as:

1. Meet minimum requirement nationally in terms of eliminating severe barriers to access and meet minimum national requirements (Buildings Regulations Technical Guidance).

2. Improvements identified to comply with best international standards for accessibility (BS 8300) and disability awareness.

All issues under 1 above are being covered by the Company’s Capital Expenditure works, budgeted for in 2008, and an application has been made for funding under the Public Transport Accessibility Programme for items identified in 2 above. All issues are scheduled to be completed over a two year period.

Iarnród Éireann:
Iarnród Éireann has carried out an audit of its premises in Rosslare Europort. Their Chief Civil Engineer is now reviewing this document to evaluate the remedial works that can be carried out on these premises during 2008.

Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company:
Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company has carried out an accessibility audit. An accessibility audit of the website was carried out and they are reviewing the content of the report. An Action Plan is being drawn up on foot of the report.

Port of Cork Company:
The Port of Cork has an accessibility audit implementation plan for Ringaskiddy Ferry Terminal, which was prepared with the assistance of specialist consultants. The company furnished the Department with a detailed report, which included a work schedule and costings.

The work schedule in the accessibility audit for the Ringaskiddy ferry terminal is as follows:
Year One:
- Health and Safety related
- Essential and Immediate work
- Management policy
- Maintenance related

Year Two:
- Important barriers to Universal Access
- Maintenance related

Year Three:
- Maintenance related

The maintenance items listed in year three will be spread between years one to three.

The Department of Transport has approved €39,120 of funding for these projects. The works are presently being put in hand and should be completed by the end of September 2008. The funding also covers the training of port staff at the Ferry Terminal.

Port Companies

Galway Harbour Company:
They have no regular passenger ferry service operating out of Galway Harbour. Access for disabled persons onto cruise liners has been included as part of plans for the new port development.

The Port of New Ross:
There are no passenger facilities in New Ross Port and no independent accessibility audit has been carried out.

Drogheda Port Company:
Drogheda Port Company does not have passenger facilities.

Dundalk Port Company:
Dundalk Port does not have passenger facilities.

Wicklow Port Company:
Wicklow Port does not have any passenger facilities.
Harbour Authorities

Kilrush Town Council:
Cappa Pier is in the town of Kilrush and Kilrush has an elected town council and it is also a harbour authority. The members of the town council are also members of the harbour authority. There are no passenger facilities at Cappa pier.

Baltimore & Skibbereen Harbour:
No accessibility audit has been carried out. Remedial work on the West Pier will include provision of new landing steps for passenger ferries.

Arklow:
There is accessibility for wheelchair users in the Marina. There are future plans for a new Marina which when completed will also have wheelchair access.

Tralee and Fenit Harbour:
Tralee and Fenit Harbour is not a passenger port. The Marina has had a lifting device to allow wheelchair users in and out of boats. There is also a wheelchair ramp in the harbour.

Relevant Departments

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food:
is responsible for six fishery harbours: Castletownbere, Killybegs, Ros an Mhíl, Dunmore East, Howth and An Daingean. At the outset, the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources was responsible for the Fishery Centres but now Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has taken over responsibility. A firm of consultants was hired to carry out an access audit on the six harbours and have since returned an Accessibility Report, which identifies a range of barriers that potentially restrict access for people with disabilities to the harbour environment. The firm identified the following:

- The facilities currently in place for disabled access within the Fishery Harbours.
- The scope for further facilities.
- The priorities in relation to the implementation of their recommendations.
- Any constraints involved in providing further facilities.

The consultants are currently in the process of carrying out an access audit on Dingle Fishery Harbour Centre.

The access assessments are with engineers in Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Once they have considered their assessments they will be in a position to move forward with an action plan.
Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Local authorities own and manage a number of other smaller harbours, out of which passenger ferry services operate which are privately operated.

In Donegal the County Council pays a subvention to the Lough Foyle and Lough Swilly Ferry Services for the operation of passenger ferry services in these areas for certain periods of the year.

In Galway the ferry service to the Aran Islands and Inishbofin is also privately owned and operated and is subvented by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The Port Companies are responsible for the provision of appropriate facilities for passengers at their harbours. Local authorities will liaise with the Companies as necessary, to promote ease of access, in general, to public and private transport from these harbours.

In the case of the smaller harbours under the control of the local authorities all new harbour infrastructure provided by local authorities will be designed and constructed to the highest standards of accessibility.

Following on an audit of their buildings, parks, roads, harbours and services, local authorities are currently engaged in drawing up implementation plans under the Department’s Sectoral Plan setting out programmes to implement the commitments and objectives contained in the Disability Act 2005 and the Sectoral Plan.

Harbours under the control of local authorities are covered by the implementation plan.

The plans will contain targets and timeframes for the carrying out of the works and priority will be given to local authority buildings and other facilities to which access is most frequently required as well as accessible public footpaths, streets and crossings in urban areas.

The Department will monitor progress on the implementation of the plans and seek reports, as appropriate, as required by the Sectoral Plan.
Customer Experience
The port sub-group did not undertake customer experience trips, however, a number of customer experience trips were carried out by the ship sub-group as part of its assessment of passenger ships. Their findings included a “snap-shot” assessment of facilities available on international and domestic passenger ferry terminals.

The following is a list of their findings for International terminals:

- The directional signage on the way to the ship in Dublin was poor.
- The paving and ramped access in the Dublin terminal wasn’t as good as it could have been.
- Whilst the paving in the Holyhead terminal was very good in general, parts of the paving outside the terminal were cobbled which can prove difficult for chair users.
- The counters were too high for chair users.
- It was difficult to find the gents toilet in the Dublin terminal; the sign could be more prominent.
- Café in Dublin terminal does not have access for chair users.

The terminal findings of the ship sub-group customer experience trip to Ros an Mhíl are included below:

- Parking: disability spaces provided (3 in staff car parking adjacent to terminal - additional in public parking areas).
- Access from parking areas to terminal was good with no steps. However one ticket office had a step outside which would hinder a chair user or person with mobility impairment. Height of counters and serving areas is important when making access available for chair users.
- Signage at the terminal was good. Toilet facilities for people with disabilities were available at the terminal site, however use of this facility was hindered due to the door opening direction and size of the toilet space.
- Staff were found to be very helpful and attentive.
Funding
The Department of Transport has a limited budget to offer grants to companies to upgrade public transport infrastructure facilities for accessibility provision. The Department invites Port Companies to make a submission on an annual basis.

Next Steps
1. All front-line staff and their managers at all Ports and Harbours that have passenger traffic should undergo disability awareness training.

2. If the Department decides to appoint a consultant to determine the accessibility of all passenger ships then the contract should include the accessibility at ports and harbours.

3. In addition to the four International ports that are obliged to carry out an accessibility audit, other ports and harbours should be strongly encouraged to conduct self-audits on their facilities and look at any remedial work that needs to be conducted.

4. In addition to the funding available from the Department of Transport consideration should be given by the Forum, to recommending to the other relevant Departments the making available of grants to assist ports and harbours undertake any remedial work necessary to improve the facilities for people with disabilities at their ports/harbours.

5. The four international ports should update the Department of Transport on progress made on their action plan on a quarterly basis.

6. Consideration should be given to drawing up recommended accessibility guidelines for Maritime Transport Operators, both port and ferry operators, similar to guidelines that have already been formalised for Public Transport Operators in Ireland.

7. Consideration should be given to getting representatives from each of the port companies to meet for a half day to discuss their obligations under the accessibility area, where it is felt that the larger companies can give some useful direction to the smaller companies, with follow up meetings a possibility.

8. This sub-group report should form the basis of the input on ports for the Review of the Sectoral Plan for Accessible Transport under the Disability Act 2005, due to be published in 2008.