

# Low floor bus for an inclusive society

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## What is a low floor bus?

A low-floor bus is a bus that has no steps between one or more entrances and part or the entire passenger cabin. Being low floor improves the accessibility of the bus for the public, particularly the elderly and people with disabilities, including those in wheelchairs and using walking frame.

In the modern context, a “low floor bus” refers to a bus that is accessible from a certain minimum height of step from ground level, to distinguish it from some historical bus designs that did feature a level of interior floor throughout but with a relatively high-floor height.

## Why is a semi low floor bus not suitable?

A semi low floor may be an appropriate bus for the elderly persons but not for persons with disabilities. Semi low floor is not disabled friendly. No wheelchair user will be able to make use of a semi low floor bus.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 9 on Accessibility says: States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure persons with disabilities have access to buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces. Mauritius being a signatory and ratified country of the UNCRPD, it is incumbent on the government to implement all the articles found in this international law.

An inaccessible transport system in Mauritius causes barrier and discrimination in the lives of persons with disabilities especially the wheelchair users. We are deprived of our equal rights to education, employment, leisure and sports, among others. Many of my friends who use wheelchair are not able to go to school because of transport issues. One of them, Muhammad Ahnas Abdool Careem is 11 years old and he has brilliantly succeeded in his CPE Exams and admitted to Royal College of Port Louis. His dad had to stop working just to make sure Ahnas is able to



attend his class as he has to personally take his son to college and back home. Is this acceptable that in 2016 a brilliant student gets admission to the best college in Mauritius and yet finds difficulty to attend his class? This is only one case and now imagine how many other cases there might be.

Recently, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Transport has obtained 20 semi low floor buses donated by China. Around 100 similar buses are expected to be

acquired by April 2016. We understand the intention of the MPI is to make sure that all Mauritian people can travel in an appropriate transport. But unfortunately it seems like the Ministry has completely forgotten persons with disabilities especially the wheelchair users. It is never too late therefore I make an urgent appeal to Hon. Nando Bodha, Minister of Public Infrastructure and Transport to review the type of buses and swap from semi low floor to low floor buses.

## Editor's note

Semi low floor buses are now part of our transport system. While these buses will provide better comfort to passengers, they still remain out of bound for most wheelchair users. However, according to different sources, it is not possible to introduce low floor buses everywhere in Mauritius. The main reasons are: the high costs and the topography of our roads. Nevertheless, to facilitate the transportation of wheelchair users, Handicap Universel proposes that the government introduces a 'Dial A Ride' system for people with disabilities, where specially designed disabled friendly buses are available, free of charge (or at nominal cost), to transport wheelchair users to hospitals, schools and other important venues. Such a system could be financed by government grants, CSR or special levies on profitable sectors such as banking. Today, we have cases where people with disabilities have to wait for endless hours at the hospital for an ambulance to drop them back home. Similarly, many people with disabilities have restricted access to leisure because of a lack of proper transport and infrastructure. We invite our decision makers and the concerned authorities to look into this issue urgently.