

DELHI METRO: MOBILITY FOR ALL

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Purpose

To provide accessibility in urban transit systems, an invaluable tool is user feedback. While interventions for inclusive design have seen specific changes in existing systems, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) was the first system in India to be designed with a holistic approach towards universal accessibility. This comprehensive planning approach translated into the accessible trains, stations, services and facilities. Buttressed by its educated and enabling support staff, the empowerment it provides not just in terms of access but in attitude, acceptance and understanding highlights the crucial role accessibility can play in society.

It is important, therefore, to emphasize the experiences of diverse users and document their feedback, both positive and negative. This will not only inform better design and implementation, but also, give impetus to more inclusive design. Towards the goal, this paper documents the experience of a first-time wheelchair user of the Delhi Metro.

Approach

Born with Arthrogryposis (a rare congenital disorder which leads to a lack of muscles in arms and legs), Nipun Malhotra a wheelchair user found travelling in Delhi was a challenge as public transport wasn't fully accessible. As experienced in Europe and Singapore he wondered – why couldn't India have accessible public transit?

This changed with the Delhi Metro in 2002. Although he had heard of its accessibility, apprehensions kept him away till 2009.

“As I entered the City Centre station and saw a lift next to the stairs my heart beat quickened with excitement and all doubts disappeared. I had finally been liberated! This was just the start. As I entered I realized that here it wasn't only the physical infrastructure that was extremely enabling but also the attitude of the staff. A person from DMRC immediately came up to me and gave me instructions on how to proceed. I didn't have to wait in long queues, and quickly got the token for my journey. As I headed to the lift, someone from housekeeping came and escorted me to the platform. There was passion in his eyes as he told me “I've been working at the Metro for two years, and it is our duty to serve you”. As I entered the train, I was assured that there would be a lift at the destination. And with this thought I got onto the train and embarked on my first metro journey!

I realized on subsequent trips that the entire Metro system was accessible. The stations have designated parking for persons with disabilities; ramps with hand rails; tactile

paving and bright color contrast for persons with vision impairment; large lettering and information displays and signage; lifts with lowered control panel, Braille, raised buttons and auditory signals; resting areas for senior citizens and disabled persons. Inside the coaches are designated spaces for wheelchair users, audio announcement with dynamic display and sensory door closing mechanisms”.

Conclusion

Nipun’s experience is reflective of the diverse Indian population’s apprehensions with regard to transit infrastructure. The accommodating and respectful staff, support systems and accessibility of the Delhi Metro provide an enabling environment that encourages and empowers its users, reducing these apprehensions.

Topic code

E. Accessible Public Transport (Bus Rapid Transit, Metro, Para-transit system, etc.)

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