

Lives in Motion: Transport and Disability Museum of Transport, Glasgow Museums

The exhibition *Lives in Motion* focused on the issue of transport. Society makes choices which can both enable and disable the lives of disabled people, and transport choices are a significant aspect of this, involving many accessibility issues.

Transport can both hinder and enable the lives of disabled people. A wheelchair user must give 24 hours' notice to get assistance when travelling by train. But some bus companies now have wheelchair-accessible vehicles, making it easier for some disabled people to travel.

Recent research by the Scottish Executive shows that the majority of disabled adults would like to travel more than they currently do. The report, 'Improved Public Transport for Disabled People', published by the Scottish Executive in 2006, revealed that there are still plenty of inequalities between disabled and non-disabled travellers. For example:

More than one obstacle or barrier exists for each journey
The barriers vary by journey type and form of transport
People with different impairments face different barriers
The problem is multi-faceted, so no single 'solution' is likely to make a difference to the travel opportunities of disabled people.

Lives in Motion explored objects from Glasgow Museums' collections and told stories of how these objects have affected people's lives and their ability to work, travel and play.

Type of interpretation

This exhibition combined multiple forms of interpretation to convey stories to people with varying abilities, and a broad range of ages, for example Text, Graphics, Audio-visual, Audio, Education programme, Artists' residencies, Film programme, Signed interpretation and Internet resources.

BSL Introduction

Our introduction area included a short BSL description of the aims and objectives of this exhibition, produced by Glasgow Museums and Deaf Connections, Glasgow.

Protest Movement

'Protest Movement' featured a black-and-white poster calling for an end to discrimination against disabled people and urging MPs to vote for the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. The poster read:

"Mary has been waiting years for the bus. Discrimination, there ought to be a law against it."

The Disability Discrimination Act was passed in November 1995. It applied to employment and the provision of goods and services, but did not cover transport. The Direct Action Network of civil rights protestors staged many protests between 1993 and 1998. They handcuffed themselves to buses and trains to try and bring an end to inaccessible public transport.

The 1995 legislation has been developed further to include public transport. However, many people with impairments still find it difficult or impossible to use public transport. Barriers to using public transport include a lack of accessible information, space for wheelchairs, and insufficiently trained staff. Many disabled people have to plan routes well in advance, and some transport providers ask for 24 hours' notice before they can guarantee to give assistance to wheelchair users.

Wheelchairs

'Wheelchairs' compared and contrasted two very different makes of wheelchair. The first of these, a dining room model, could only be used indoors, large wheels at the front made it impossible to traverse raised heights such as kerbs and other obstacles.

The wheelchair was once a symbol of dependence and weakness. The design of wheelchairs at the beginning of the 20th century meant wheelchair users had to rely on other people to help them get about. Throughout the last one hundred years, wheelchair design has improved dramatically. Wheelchairs are now much lighter and more durable, and users have greater flexibility of movement, both indoors and outdoors. Because of improvements in design and technology and the emergence of the disabled rights movement, wheelchairs have now become a symbol for freedom and independent living.

The RGK sports wheelchair is a good example of recent improvements in design and technology. Wheelchairs are now available for different lifestyles, and can be designed and built to each person's specifications.

The display included an additional photographic panel featured Neil Johnstone, aged 14, from Glasgow, participating in the Great Scottish Run (courtesy of Marathon Photos).

Our Journey

This section of **Lives in Motion** featured a slide show of captioned photographs, incorporating 24 slides displaying Peggy Boyle and Jackie Shields from the Three Eyes Project, Knightswood, Glasgow, who went on a journey by foot and public transport to test accessibility for wheelchair users.

This proved to be an eventful experience as is evident in the images recorded during the journey. This simple form of interpretation also proved to be a powerful way of communicating the message that travel, by foot and public transport, presents many obstacles.

This slide show was incorporated into a seated booth where further text and graphic material was available as a handout to visitors, which contained all images and large text descriptions. This material was also available online as downloadable material with additional screen resolution adaptability.

Broadening Horizons

The object showcased in 'Broadening Horizons' was the AC car – locally known as 'wee bluey'. It had very responsive steering and sometimes went round corners on two of its three wheels. It reacted badly in crosswinds, which led to some fatal accidents. Owners were not supposed to carry passengers or drive faster than 40 miles per hour.

The Government introduced the AC car in the 1950s. It allowed them to avoid tackling some of the wider public transport issues for disabled people at the time. Despite the difficulties and dangers of driving these cars, they also brought great freedom to disabled people. Some drivers travelled across Europe in them, had romantic liaisons in them, and 'souped' them up with more powerful engines.

Further photographic information showed the AC cars in a municipal compound before being scrapped. The car, which had been provided by the Government, was phased out from 1976.

This display featured an audio-visual interpretation by Brian Sweeney, a disability consultant and an AC car driver in the early 1960s. The duration of this audio-visual was two minutes long and featured Brian discussing his experiences as an AC driver. The content was informed by, and included, serious facts about the history of these vehicles but was delivered in a light-hearted and humorous style.

As with all audio-visual material in this exhibition it was accompanied by signed interpretation courtesy of Deaf Connections, Glasgow, as well as further on screen textual descriptions. Further large text A4 laminated panels were also

available adjacent to the audio-visual screen offering visitors another accessible interpretation format. Once again this material was available online in QuickTime format and with accompanying textual descriptions in various accessible formats.

Out and About

Under the theme of 'Out and About' we explored the Batricar. This mode of transport provides mobility and independence to a wide range of people, including some who don't consider themselves disabled.

You don't have to be old to use a powered wheelchair like the Batricar. A survey carried out 20 years ago showed that:

35% of users were between 31 and 50 years old
5% were under 30 years old
18% were more than 70 years old.

You don't need any experience to drive these vehicles. Anyone aged 14 years and over can drive one. You don't need to pass a test, have an eye examination, pay road tax or have insurance.

There are now around 90,000 powered wheelchairs or scooters in use in the UK.

The object itself was an old example of this type of vehicle (approx 1990). As we didn't have more modern examples within our collection we felt that it was necessary to accompany this object with text and graphics panels which included images taken during 'street' interviews.

They Work Again

'They Work Again' showcased the Austin Motors J40 pedal car made by disabled ex-miners at a factory in South Wales in 1966. It was designed to look 'just like the real thing'.

The ex-miners who made this pedal car had been disabled by their dangerous jobs in the mines of South Wales. Many suffered from 'the black lung' – pneumoconiosis – which was caused by inhaling coal dust down the mines. By 1945, more than 5,000 miners had the disease and were unfit for work in the mines.

The Government invested in factories in the mining areas to enable the miners to return to work. The factory in Bargoed opened in 1949 and was leased to Austin Motors. The company employed only people with disabilities – 60% of them had 'the black lung'.

In 2002, 52% of disabled people were unable to find paid work.

Audio-visual material included footage from 'They Work Again' (1957) which showed disabled ex-miners working in the Austin factory where they built the J40

pedal cars. This lasted 57 seconds, with subtitles and BSL signage once again provided by Deaf Connections, Glasgow.

Ian Hamilton – Travel Stories

Broadcaster and journalist Ian Hamilton was commissioned to contribute two revealing and amusing stories of his personal experiences of using public transport from his perspective as a blind person. These stories were: 'Travel Story' and 'Am I invisible?'

Balance

The Howie Dove Therapy Tricycle changed Gordon Wallace's life. He was able to cycle with his friends, broaden his horizons beyond the limits of home and school, and feel part of the community where he lived.

Gordon's impairment meant he found balancing on a bicycle difficult. He used the tricycle until he was 10 years old, when he began to feel he was different from other children and felt uncomfortable using it.

The Dove Therapy Tricycle is one of a range of cycles specially designed to make cycling accessible for children and adults with impairments and difficulties in balancing.

Lives in Motion Film and Events Programme

A is for Autism

Director: Tim Webb

Running time 15 minutes

Wan Big Family

Director: Martyn Robertson

Company: Fablevision

Running time 30 minutes

Making of First One Down, Super Grand Prix

Running time 10 minutes

Elegy for the Elswick Envoy

Director: Nancy Willis, 2007

Company: Maverick Television

Running time 25 minutes

Talk

Director: Matthew Parkhill

Produced by Winkle Films

Running Time 12 minutes

Art Trek in Residence

22nd, 29th October; 5th, 12th and 19th November

Online Resources

We aimed to make **Lives in Motion** as fully accessible as possible online. This material will remain within www.glasgowmuseums.com as archival resources.

Further developments included: Youtube & Flickr sites which encouraged further photographic and video material from participants worldwide.

Consultation

Glasgow Museums acknowledges the help of the following organisations and individuals during the development of the **Lives in Motion** exhibition:

Deaf Connections, Glasgow
Fair Deal, Castlemilk, Glasgow
Three Eyes Project, Knightswood, Glasgow
Brian Sweeney, Disability Consultant, Glasgow
Gordon Wallace and Family
National Autistic Society, Daldorch House School, East Ayrshire
Ian Hamilton, Broadcaster, BBC Scotland
Project Ability, Glasgow
Art Trek, Glasgow
Sense Scotland
Stuart and Douglas Annan
Kathleen Little, Photographer, Glasgow
Basharat Khan, Photographer, Glasgow
David Griffin, Media Arts+Services Scotland
Glasgow Centre for Independent Living
Caroline Johnstone, Neil's Wheels
Mrs Linda Dunsmuir, East Kilbride
Mrs Grace Pannifer, Essex
Mrs Barbara Wallace, Australia
The Herald, Newsquest Media Group
Galen Smith, Photographer, USA
Disability Information and Resource Centre, South Australia
RADAR, The Disability Network, UK
Global-Photos
Transport Working Group, Glasgow
Project Ability

Collaboration

Glasgow Museums would like to acknowledge the help of the following in the development of the **Lives in Motion** film programme:

British Film Institute
Channel 4
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Fablevision
Maverick Television
Nancy Willis
Project Ability
Winkle Films

Collections

Protest Movement: Poster
Wheelchairs: Dining wheelchair. RGK sports wheelchair
Broadening Horizons: AC car
Out and About: Batricar
They Work Again: Austin Motors J40 pedal car
Balance: Howie Dove Therapy Tricycle

Timescale

Research and Development: January – April 2007
Design and Production: April – September 2007
Exhibition: 18th October 2007 – 31st October 2008

Issues Learnt from the Project

It is society which defines disabled people as ‘different’, as a ‘separate’ group. Individual disabled people do not necessarily relate to these representations. Museums’ collections need to reflect the complexities of disabled people’s lives by seeking more creative and responsive methods towards contemporary collecting.

The difficulties and complexities of engaging with different audiences and groups that museums categorise as disabled must not be underestimated. Realistic organisational resources need to be sustained to enable the effective and meaningful development of relationships with disability representatives, organisations and individuals.

Deaf people, generally, want to be recognised as a cultural-linguistic minority. They do not always identify themselves as disabled or as part of the disabled community. Curatorial partnerships with deaf people are essential for effective and responsive exhibition development. Similarly, genuine partnerships with disabled people should be the way forward if we seek a responsive cultural service sector.

Interpretation needs to be comprehensive and multiple to take account of varying abilities and learning styles. Any form of interpretation is only meaningful if it makes the visitor look again at the object it interprets, with enhanced understanding.

Legacy

Disabled people are invisible or misrepresented in museum collections. We should continue to develop creative and responsive ways of ensuring our collections continue to be reflective of disabled people's experiences.

We should ensure that Learning and Access remain at the heart of all of our interpretative development. Interpretation must continue to give cognisance to the complexity of learning styles and abilities.

We recognise that we need to continue to identify realistic resources to support our work with disabled people.

We will continue to strive for more equal representation from disabled people amongst our staff base.

We will work to sustain staff training initiatives which are crucial to understanding issues of disability, and should be for all museums staff; front line, curatorial, management etc.