

Access and Inclusion Plan - Community Consultation
Issues Paper 2 - Infrastructure and Community Access

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Introduction

Between November 2011 and March 2012 over 260 people across Tweed Shire participated in a community consultation on access and inclusion. The purpose of the consultation was to provide the community with the opportunity to make access and inclusion issues known to Council. This will assist in the development of a formal policy and action plan that responds to community experience.

This Issues Paper reports on the results of the community consultation that relate to infrastructure and community access and should be read in conjunction with Issues Paper 1 *Consultation Summary* which gives a background to the legislative and policy framework for access and inclusion.

The ability to be involved in community life

A continuous path of travel is the basic requirement for people with disability to go about the community and do the things that need to be done in the course of everyday life. The continuous path of travel includes footpaths, curb ramps and crossings, ramped access into businesses, accessible car parking and accessible toilets.

More than sixty six percent (66.4%) of the total access matters raised in the consultation involved these elements. This tells us that people with disabilities in Tweed Shire are experiencing significant barriers in the ability to be involved in community life.

"I used to be able to go in and choose my own DVDs but now I can't get into the shop because the new place has a step. I have to wait outside until they come out and then I have to tell them what I want. I'd rather browse and choose my own DVDs." (Teenager who uses a wheelchair)

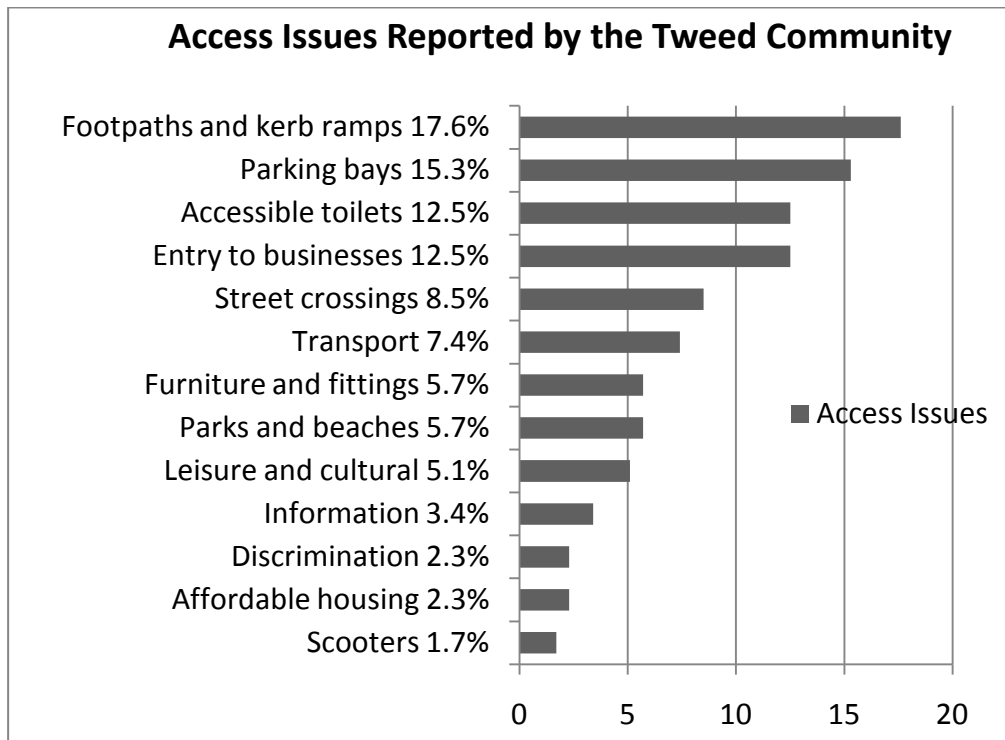


Table 1 - Access issues in Tweed Shire Table 1 shows the access issues raised by the community by frequency.

Solutions

Footpath construction and maintenance

People who participated in the consultation contributed a wide range of suggestions and solutions to improve access in Tweed Shire. In response to the question, what would make a big difference in terms of access and inclusion, suggestions largely mirrored the issues already identified as problems. These include the need to improve the maintenance of existing footpaths and to build additional footpaths in locations where a continuous path of travel is needed to make access possible for people with disabilities.

"I like to be as independent as possible but many of these points of transition from footpath to road have very steep gradients ...capable of throwing my [wheel] chair backwards and onto the ground so I am restricted to where I can go. In some instances I have to actually access the road dodging traffic." (Comment from yoursaytweed website)

Footpath trading and accessibility

Businesses need to keep the footpaths clear along the building side and place advertising, merchandise, tables and chairs along the road edge. This makes it possible for people with vision impairment to navigate their way safely by using the building line as a guide. There is an equally strong message for businesses to make their premises accessible with ramped entryways in order for people to enter and keep clear aisles so people can move about with safety.

Seats for resting

A number of people suggested the inclusion of more seats at intervals along footpaths and walking routes in built up areas and park lands so that people could rest along the way. This is particularly important for older people and people who have disabilities relating to mobility. The position of seating can make the difference between independence and dependence for someone with disabilities or who is older.

Accessible car parking spaces

Along with footpaths and access to premises the placement of accessible car parking bays was identified by many respondents as something that would make a big difference in their lives. These need to be strategically and appropriately placed as part of the continuous path of travel and to meet the minimum standard in design. Where possible, accessible parking bays need to be covered to provide protection from the weather for people who may take longer to exit and enter cars.

Access in parks, beaches and water ways

A number of respondents want to see better access to beaches and other water ways especially with the construction of viewing and fishing platforms.

It is important to feel included. Being an outdoors beach person has made this difficult. The beach was always a social contact point but this is limited.

Would love to see observation decks at South Beach, Salt, Casuarina and all along the Tweed Coast, pruning done at the deck at Fingal so a person in a wheelchair can see the water, concrete paths built out along Kingscliff and Tweed breakwaters like Ballina, fishing decks included along Kingscliff Boardwalk and other places along Tweed River, maintained beach access for cars to confidently go on and off the beach without the fear

of being stuck, creek access points to swim in the salt water, motorised or more suitable beach chair

Accessible toilets

The ability to be involved in community life for many people with disabilities depends on the availability of accessible toilets. This is a basic requirement that everyone needs. Consistent and understandable signage can also make toilets more accessible. Signage helps people with intellectual or mental health disability or people who don't speak English access appropriate toilet facilities in a dignified way.

[An] old public toilet block features male and female wording on the walls adjacent to a 'wheelchair' symbol for the accessible toilet. When I was with a group of young people with Down syndrome recently, they all queued at the toilet section with the 'wheelchair' symbol and were reluctant to enter the other toilets because they were not able to read the wording on the walls.

Conclusion

The access matters in this issues paper raised in the community consultation will provide a sound basis for the development of the Tweed Shire Access and Inclusion Action Plan. It is important to remember that access is a universal concept and applies to the whole community. People with disabilities have families and friends that depend on accessibility in order participate in the community together. When a business is not accessible whole groups of customers are being lost not just individuals with disabilities. Business and local government need to work together to make the community accessible to all residents and visitors.



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