CONFERENCE ON TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY AND OLDER PEOPLE
at **Europe House, Smith Square, London**
12 September 2018

What do older people need to be able to Self-Determine?
Common problems and Best Practice.
An EU and UK perspective.

The title is a variant I am afraid on what was originally shown. I do not intend to talk to you about Best Practice across Europe and point the way to high quality access for older people, although hopefully out of it will come some pointers towards better access and Inclusion for the growing number of older people in Society.

In fact if we don't find ways of helping those that have a degree of Manoeuvrability get around in society, we shall be in even more trouble than we are in today in the provision of Care, Health and general wellbeing.

So this is about what I think we need to enable ordinary oldies like this Octogenarian, travel to this venue, on his own, without needing specific assistance.

At Age Annual Conference in Brussels. 6th June 2018. I covered much of what I shall say today under the title **Supporting Older Persons' Right to Self-Determination.**

My core message, if self-advocacy means something more than being a self-opinionated old Bore, is that whatever happens we need balance.

Not just balance to avoid falling over, well we need that as well of course, but somehow be empowered to manage for ourselves with aid on hand when it is needed. **Dignity** in a word.

Remember that just as with children who learn at different speeds, some talk early, some walk early, so it is with old age. We change at different rates and at different speeds, often swiftly losing different skills.

Just as quickly as children learn things so we older people quickly forget things. Our status changes quickly the older we get. Self-determination in itself will be different for each person because of this.

So solutions are complex because the problem is complex.

It is not just about design and IT. It is about getting into the heads of the bright young things that design these programmes that too much planning, too much constant change and upgrading, "freshening the Website" etc., all these clever Gismos can have a reverse effect.

They need to be told that the bigger the step forward by the Innovator the bigger the gap they create between themselves and the user.

Accessibility is a good objective and Universal Access a wonderful term. They are not new terms and they will not be achieved by technology alone. People matter to the old.

It is proven time and time again in many areas of health, housing, transport and much else, that the presence of staff and contact with human beings is of paramount importance.

The Technology is merely a backup.

For years now we have tried to help the ageing process be dignified and self-determined. Sadly the many schemes that have come and gone are short lived because there is not the political will to sustain them.

You only have to list a few of the different schemes, all excellent ideas and initiatives. Here are some of the Acronyms; AALLIANCE, OASIS, DREAMING, MEDIATE, ASK it. They start with a flourish, they are funded well, but many die on the altar of financial cuts. Not just in the UK but all across Mainland Europe.

Older people need to be insisting that schemes need implementation. Implementation backed up with Action plans and ongoing funding or else all these conferences and projects are just words!

The problem is not new! I go back with Age Platform to 2004/05 when along with Gerard Cornet we considered technology and travel with a new dimension!

I realise now we were foolishly optimistic, we expected that with what Gerard called our "little Techy Friends" help, mobile phones as it turns out, we would plan journeys, purchase tickets, make sides of vehicles open up, flat step-free surfaces would appear and it would all be a technical wonderland!

However the life of a Jumbo Jet, a TGV, or ICE or Pendolino or a modern Bus or Coach are over 30 years so for the most part, despite the wonderful concepts we are stuck with what we have got. We then have to seek solutions within a reality framework.

What we also overlooked all those years ago was that technology unless controlled is as much our enemy as it is our friend. Too much technology leads to a people less world of machines. I say again to you remember it is a proven fact that older and vulnerable people value the presence of staff whenever they are out and about in the community. Many older People are not IT savvy and the thought of using what they see as a complicated machine is a worry and may well discourage them from travel and communication. So again there has to be a **Balance**

So how can one self-regulate?

For me the important thing was ensuring I had the will power to self-regulate and keep going by finding solutions to enable me to tackle the things that are becoming too difficult. For example I do not use the Underground in London or the Metro in Brussels, or Paris for that matter. It is too stuffy, too crowded and I am less comfortable or tolerant of those conditions because I am old.

I am also more apprehensive in noisy crowds, more easily frightened than before. Also you have to realise in a threatening situation you can't even run away! If I run, I am likely to stumble; if I stumble I go down. The old do not recover balance quickly.

When using of my car. I do not tackle complicated networks of roads I am unfamiliar with. I do not make long journeys, nor do as much night time driving as before. But that means I am still here.

The acceptance that you may have some loss of mobility, acceptance that your acuity is not so great as before and acknowledgement of the frailty is key. Silly old people refusing to acknowledge the facts inevitably lead to some organisational intrusion to change some unsafe practice or other.

Mostly we value our independence but to self-determine and have inclusion there needs to

be systems in place to provide societal support. Many older people would give up the car, drive less, join coffee mornings, local groups and take community opportunities, enjoy social activities where an older person meets people and feels part of a community and information needs to be readily available of what is on offer in whatever community they are in.

However many older people are in difficult circumstances, poverty in fact, directly as a result of government cuts in Social Services and amenities. It is difficult for inclusion without Accessible Transport but the local community bus services are being withdrawn. Day Centres are closing. It is almost impossible to down-size (or right-size the term now used) as suitable housing is few and far between.

Older people's organisations need to be critical of governments not just wait for something to happen. Many of those organisations depend on government for finance, but that does not mean they have to run along behind that government like a dog wagging its tail!

Not just here but in other parts of Europe Regulations are carefully debated, documented and issued but not implemented. Why? Because implementation is a matter for the Member States. Despite the rubbish we hear in this country about Brussels controlling everything I find in the areas I specialise in Rail Accessibility, there is reluctance by the Commission to act and many places do not implement what is needed with any degree of alacrity!

Even the TSI (Technical Specification for Interoperability) for PRM (Persons of reduced Mobility) upon which I am Age Platform's mandated representative, much work has been done to get an accessible network. Many hours of hard work clarifying the differences, ensuring there is no ambiguity. However, when it comes to implementation I sense many member states are dragging their feet and the Commission itself is reluctant to push.

"Five year periods to collect data" has been talked about. To a person in a wheelchair, or indeed to older people who feel vulnerable, 5 years is an unacceptable gap in progress. I shall be 89 in 5 years' time as will many more of my fellow Europeans. We cannot wait!

Since money features so largely in people's minds it needs to be noted and remembered that without inclusion we contribute little and cost more.

So I finish with a few facts about my generation. For me Self-determination is acknowledging them and meeting the challenge these random factors give us.

Not all of us have all of these remember!!!

1. Older people are easily upset and offended
2. Older people can easily misunderstand an acronym
3. Older people whilst not clinically deaf can mishear.
4. Older people when faced with an IT problem easily believe it is their fault.
5. Older people prefer not to Multi task or consider two things at once
6. Older people are less manoeuvrable and fall easily
7. Older people when travelling are sole minded on that and that alone
8. Older people have a wisdom born of experience often not valued
9. Older people sometimes get the impression they are invisible to the young
10. Older people value their dignity and find being patronised infuriating
11. Older people prefer not/should not be encouraged to run
12. Older people sometimes fear crowds
13. Older people often believe themselves unsafe without reassurance
14. Older people are not all happy with or connected to email
15. Older people cannot walk long distances without a rest

16. Older people cannot easily put their shoes back on after security checks

17. Older people prefer bus stops nearby and not long distance apart

18. Older people require IT standardisation, slow programmes not ever changing upgraded websites. Plus ability to "save the page" you mostly use

19. Older people are not reassured by CCTV and disembodied voices, have less trust in technology. Are put off by absence of staff thus real or imagined our safety in public places is important

20. Older people lose confidence previously held and constantly check that they have not lost their ticket, mislaid handbag. Put mobile phone somewhere. A general forgetfulness increases worry and insecurity

21. Older people, like children, are sometimes unreasonably fractious!

All that said we wish to be treated with normality, we like company, human contact we do not want to be ignored, we still have the same emotions. We may be 70+ but we still often "fancy" each other. So normality is important.

I could go on and on, also repeat myself. Another prerogative of the old! What I want society to realise is all this melange of emotions is an opportunity, not a problem

Given Inclusion we are not tomorrow's problem but part of tomorrow's solution.

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