

Temporary Exemptions Report

2023-2024

V/Line: DSAPT Exemption Part 2.1/2.6/2.8/6.4/8.2 and
Premises Standards H2.2

Introduction

V/Line's role

V/Line is an operating agency, forming part of Victoria's integrated transport portfolio, and delivering services under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP).

V/Line is:

- An accredited operator of passenger services, including rail and coach;
- A freight access provider;
- A maintainer of railway infrastructure and rolling stock;
- A key contributor towards Victoria's large infrastructure projects; and
- A supporter of tourist and heritage rail operations.

About V/Line

As a brand, V/Line has provided public transport services for more than 40 years, safely connecting people across Victorian communities.

V/Line is a major employer with a workforce of more than 2,700 people, many who live and work in regional Victoria.

V/Line operates passenger rail services between Melbourne and:

- Geelong and Warrnambool;
- Ballarat, Maryborough and Ararat;
- Bendigo, Swan Hill and Echuca;
- Seymour, Shepparton and Albury; and
- Traralgon, Sale and Bairnsdale.

Each week, V/Line schedules more than 2,250 rail services between Melbourne and regional centres. More than 1,520 V/Line branded coach services connect with the rail network and serve regional Victorian communities. Some of V/Line's coach services also link Victoria with South Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Private sector operators provide all V/Line-branded coach services under the management of V/Line.

V/Line also maintains more than 3,780 kilometres of rail track used by passenger and freight rail operators.

V/Line's Accessibility Action Plan 2022 to 2025

V/Line launched its Accessibility Action Plan 2022 to 2025 in August 2022. V/Line has continued to progress several of the key priority areas outlined in the plan.

In 2023 to 2024, some key achievements of V/Line's included that it:

- delivered three Try Before You Ride events.
- provided frontline staff with a refresher training module on disability awareness and communication access.
- continued to engage with V/Line's Accessibility Reference Group.
- further expanded V/Line's partnership with Travellers Aid Australia by offering a mobility support service at Ballarat Station and supporting its passengers at various stations during planned disruptions.
- launched social scripts on the V/Line website to better assist passengers with accessing the network and V/Line services.
- continued to support Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program and provided lanyards to passengers who requested them at key locations across the network.
- commenced delivery of the DSAPT minor works package which aims to upgrade or install items that improve accessibility across several locations. For example, accessible bathrooms, tactile ground surface indicators and seating; and
- launched accessible bookings for passengers using a mobility aid to reserve an accessible space on long-distance train services ahead of travel.

Temporary Exemptions Reporting

Exemptions Details Transport Standards 2.1 /Premises Standards H2.2

Exemptions from the Transport Standards 2.1 Access Paths Unhindered Passage and the Premises Standards H2.2 Accessways

Temporary Exemption: Existing rail premises and existing rail infrastructure

For a period of five years, flange gaps of up to 75mm are permitted where a level crossing forms part of an access path on existing rail premises or existing rail infrastructure, subject to the following conditions.

Reporting Requirements

The ARA member concerned provides reports to the Commission every 12 months identifying:

- a) Each station and the relevant mode of rail where a level crossing forms part of an access path.

To achieve compliance with the Transport Standards and Premises Standards, access path surfaces should be smooth and even with no gaps greater than 3mm.

Given that the standards do not make any exception for rail pedestrian crossings, which, by their nature, must provide sufficient gaps (usually more than 40mm) for train wheel flanges, only elimination of the rail level crossing can provide a fully compliant solution.

All pedestrian pathways crossing the rail tracks at V/Line stations require upgrades with a grade separation structure, such as an overpass or underpass, to remove the flange gaps entirely.

There are 33 V/Line stations where a rail pedestrian crossing forms part of an access path within the station precincts (Table 1).

Table 1: Stations with pedestrian crossing present on access paths

EASTERN REGION	NORTH EAST REGION	NORTHERN REGION	SOUTH WEST REGION	WESTERN REGION
Bunyip	Broadford	Castlemaine	Corio	Ardeer
Longwarry	Chiltern*	Clarkefield	Lara	Ballarat
Moe	Donnybrook	Eaglehawk	Little River	
Nar Nar Goon	Heathcote Jct	Epsom	North Shore	
Rosedale	Kilmore East	Gisborne		
Trafalgar	Violet Town*	Kangaroo Flat		
Yarragon	Wallan	Kyneton		
	Wandong	Macedon		
	Avenel	Malmsbury		
		Riddles Creek		
		Woodend		

* Chiltern and Violet Town stations are maintained by a third party

The results from a survey on flange gaps conducted in 2023 identified that all flange gaps measured at the rail pedestrian crossings within the station precincts did not exceed 75mm but were greater than 3mm.

b) The progress made to implement the strategy at each location.

Both the Federal and Victorian governments have invested more than \$4 billion in the Regional Rail Revival (RRR) program, which includes significant station upgrades on the regional network.

This RRR program has already seen the construction of overpass pedestrian structures to improve access at the following stations:

- Bacchus Marsh
- Ballan
- Wendouree
- Cobblebank
- Rockbank
- Deer Park
- Traralgon.

c) The actual expenditure incurred in implementing the improvement of access paths through level crossings by eliminating, reducing or phasing out flange gaps on access paths at each location in the previous 12 months, expressed as a dollar figure and as a percentage of total operating budget.

While no budget was allocated over the past 12 months to eliminating, reducing or phasing out flange gaps through level crossings at each listed location, V/Line is committed to improving accessibility across its network.

There are significant programs of works underway to upgrade and improve the regional rail network, including the \$4 billion Regional Rail Revival (RRR) program. While this project is improving accessibility on the network, accessibility improvements form part of the overall program of works and actual expenditure is not easily calculable.

An extensive package of works is being delivered to improve accessibility on the Gippsland Line via the RRR Program. As part of the Gippsland Line Upgrade, major construction was complete on accessibility and amenity improvements at Bunyip, Longwarry, Morwell and Traralgon stations for improved passenger journeys.

The Morwell Station upgrades included improving the accessibility of the pedestrian underpass and pathway to platform 1 and improving lighting for passenger safety. At Traralgon Station V/Line constructed and opened a new pedestrian overpass with improved accessibility and serviced by four lifts.

Pedestrian level crossings at Bunyip and Longwarry stations that are subject to this exemption were upgraded in the reporting year to improve their safety.

As part of the Level Crossing Removal Project, significant works have been undertaken at Deer Park Station. The opening of the new staffed station building features lift and ramp access to both platforms and a pedestrian walkway connecting forecourts on both sides of the rail line, which has improved access in and to the station precinct. This project makes up part of the statewide Level Crossing Removal program, which will see 110 dangerous and congested level crossings removed across Victoria by 2030 with 80 already gone.

Plans are also underway to improve accessibility at Ballarat Station, including installing a pedestrian overpass with a passenger lift and stairs connecting both platforms. Construction on the \$50 million upgrade is scheduled to be completed in 2026.

The various packages of works mentioned above form part of an ongoing effort to improve accessibility of the network. Each of these upgrades and improvements make up a portion of the overall project spend. The specific expenditure is not quantifiable.

d) The percentage rate of improvement of access paths through level crossings by eliminating, reducing, or phasing out flange gaps on access paths.

While no budget was allocated over the past 12 months to eliminating, reducing or phasing out flange gaps through level crossings at each listed location, V/Line is committed to improving accessibility across its network.

As described above, V/Line is improving accessibility on parts of the network but given these upgrades make up part of the overall program of works, actual percentage is not easily calculable.

The ARA member makes these reports available on its website throughout the exemption period.

V/Line will continue to provide an update on its progress via its exemption report, which is to be updated on an annual basis.

The report will be available on V/Line's website: <https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/Accessibility>

Exemptions Details Transport Standards 2.6

Exemptions from the Transport Standards 2.6 Access Paths Conveyances

Temporary Exemption: Existing rail conveyances

For a period of five years, an access path is only required at a single door of existing rail conveyances, subject to the following conditions:

Equivalent access is provided at an alternative door of the rail conveyance in the following circumstances:

- a) if an allocated space is not available
- b) to ensure access to unique facilities, including an accessible bathroom (where provided), or
- c) to ensure a passenger can both board and alight the rail conveyance.

Reporting Requirements

The ARA member utilising this exemption provides reports to the Commission every 12 months from the date of this exemption setting out the member's progress toward providing access paths between the entrance of a conveyance and all allocated spaces and facilities for passengers with disabilities, including:

- a) **The number of conveyances over which this exemption is claimed and the relevant mode of rail travel.**

During the current reporting period, the temporary exemption to board from a single door is claimed for the following rail conveyances:

- N-Set: 8
- Sprinters: 21
- VLocity: 118

VLocity trains currently provide passengers with accessibility needs a minimum of two accessible doors to board and alight from at any time. VLocity trains continue to be progressively added to the V/Line network. 12 VLocity trains were added to the fleet between June 2023 and June 2024.

The modern, more reliable and accessible VLocity trains are replacing V/Line's ageing, classic fleet trains, which are being progressively retired from the network.

This includes V/Line's H-Set carriages, with the last of these carriages making their final journey on the network in early 2024 during the reporting period.

Fleet Type	Number in Service 2023	Number in Service 2024
VLocity 3 carriage set	106	118
N-set (with 1 accessible carriage)	7	0
N-set (with 2 accessible carriages)	4	8
H-set (with 1 accessible carriage)	3	0
H-set (with 2 accessible carriages)	6	0
Sprinter	21	21

- b) **The actual expenditure incurred in implementing the strategy in the previous 12 months, expressed as a dollar figure and as a percentage of total budget.**

The Victorian Government invested \$601 million in the 2023/24 State Budget to build an additional 23 new VLocity trains.

Each VLocity train has six accessible spaces per three-carriage set and this investment will ensure V/Line can continue to progressively replace classic fleet trains with VLocity trains across the regional network.

While we work to progressively roll out more VLocity trains, we also deliver a considerable program of upgrades on our classic fleet trains.

These upgrades have improved the availability of accessible carriages on long-distance services, and also improved amenities for passengers with mobility aids travelling on our Sprinter trains which run to commuter locations.

Two out of the six doors on each VLocity set are currently accessible and provide access to the accessible features onboard (including the allocated spaces and accessible bathroom).

To provide for all doors to be accessible with a continuous access path, an entirely new model of train would be required to replace V/Line's existing fleet.

- c) The safety procedures and staff training in place to ensure the safe and timely evacuation of people with disability from conveyances in the event that evacuation is required, including in the event of an emergency.**

Safety procedures

V/Line has a positive duty to eliminate discrimination on its services, so far as is reasonably practicable. It takes positive steps to do so via its conductors, who assist passengers with accessibility needs during their journey. The conductors' duties extend to assisting passengers with accessibility needs during the following:

- Evacuation when a train is at a station;
- Evacuation when a train is between stations (detraining procedure); and
- Duties during delay and disruption.

Emergency response plans have been developed for each corridor to identify all relevant personnel and specific procedure applicable at each station.

Staff training

All V/Line conductors undergo 10 specialised training modules at the commencement of their employment during a five-week course, which includes the following modules:

- General customer service training;
- Disability awareness;
- Communication access training, including a face-to-face session with personnel from external training provider SCOPE;
- Hidden Disabilities Sunflower;
- Diversity and Inclusion e-Learning modules; and
- Incident response procedure.

Conductors are specifically briefed during their training period on the procedures for the following situations:

- *'Assisting Customers with Accessibility Needs'*;
- *'Assist Conductor and Conductor Handovers'*;
- *'Conductor and Customer Service Manager Duties During a Delay or Disruption'*;
- *'Evacuating Customers from a Train when not at a Platform'*;
- *'Emergency Evacuation of Customers from a Train – Conductor Incapacitated'*;
- *'Deployment of the Boarding Ramp'*;
- *'The Running of Heavily Patronised Trains'*; and
- *'Ticketing Interactions Between Conductors and Customers'*.

Conductors also receive two weeks of on-the-job training with senior conductors, where they are mentored through various duties.

Refresher training courses are run for conductors annually. V/Line staff can also view accessibility training material videos on the V/Line intranet at any time.

Conductors and frontline customer service staff receive special disability awareness and communication access training. V/Line is accredited with the Communication Access Symbol, meaning its staff can communicate effectively with passengers, and communication tools are available to help staff communicate and better understand passengers with communication requirements. V/Line is also a member of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program.

The ARA member utilising this exemption makes these plans and reports available on its website throughout the exemption period.

V/Line will provide an update on its progress via its exemption report, which is to be updated on an annual basis.

The report will be available on V/Line's website: <https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/Accessibility>

Exemptions Details: Transport Standards 2.8

Exemptions from the Transport Standards 2.8 Extent of Path

Temporary Exemption : Existing rail conveyances

For a period of five years, an access path is only required at a single door of existing rail conveyances, subject to the following conditions:

Reporting Requirement:

Same conditions as Clause 2.6

Please refer to V/Line response to Part 2.6 Access paths – Conveyances

Exemptions Details Transport Standards 6.4

Exemptions from the Transport Standards 6.4 Slope of external boarding ramps

Temporary Exemption: Existing rail conveyances

For a period of five years, for existing rail conveyances, where the relationship between the platform and rail carriage means that an external boarding ramp can only be provided at a gradient greater than 1 in 8 and less than 1 in 4, ARA members are not required to provide staff assistance in ascending or descending the ramp, subject to the following conditions.

Reporting Requirements

The ARA member utilising this exemption report to the Commission annually thereafter on:

- a) The number of locations where an external board ramp can only be provided at a gradient greater than 1 in 8 and less than 1 in 4 and the relevant mode of rail travel impacted.

Table 3: Boarding ramp gradient / station platform

BOARDING GRADIENT	RAMP STATIONS [PLATFORM NO.]
Gradient of 1:8 or shallower	Kerang[1]; Avenel[2]; Wodonga[1]; Deer Park [1,2];Violet Town[2]; Garfield[2]; Little River[2]
Gradient steeper than 1:8	<p>Clarkefield [1,2]; Riddells Creek [1,2]; Gisborne [1,2]; Macedon [1]; Woodend [1,2]; Kyneton [1,2]; Malmsbury [1,2]; Castlemaine [2]; Kangaroo Flat [1]; Bendigo [1,2]; Epsom [1]; Huntly [1]; Goornong [1]; Elmore [1]; Rochester [1]; Echuca [1]; Raywood [1]; Dingee[1];Pyramid Hill [1]; Swan Hill [1]; Avenel [1]; Euroa [1]; Violet Town [1]; Benalla [1,2]; Wangaratta [1,2]; Springhurst [1,2]; Chiltern [1,2]; Donnybrook [1,2]; Wallan [1]; Heathcote junction [2]; Wandong [1,2]; Kilmore East [1]; Broadford [1]; Seymour [1,3]; Nagambie [1]; Murchison East [1]; Nar Nar Goon [1,2]; Garfield [1]; Bunyip [1,2]; Longwarry [1,2]; Drouin [1,2]; Warragul [1,2]; Yarragon [1,2]; Trafalgar [1,2]; Moe [1]; Morwell [1,2]; Traralgon [1,2]; Rosedale [1]; Sale [1]; Stratford [1]; Bairnsdale [1]; Tarneit [1,2]; Wyndham Vale [1,2]; Little River [1]; Lara [1,2]; North Shore [1]; North Geelong [1,2]; Geelong [1,2,3]; Marshall [1]; Waurin Ponds [1,2]; Winchelsea [1]; Birregurra [1]; Colac [1]; Camperdown [1]; Terang [1]; Sherwood Park [1]; Ardeer [1]; Caroline Springs [1,2]; Rockbank [1,2]; Cobblebank [1,2]; Melton [2]; Bacchus Marsh [2]; Ballan [1,2]; Ballarat [1]; Wendouree [1,2]; Ararat [1]; Creswick [1]; Clunes [1]; Talbot [1]</p> <p>Castlemaine [1]; Eaglehawk [1]; Wallan [1]; Heathcote Junction [1]; Tallarook [1,2]; Tynong [1,2]; Drouin [1]; Corio [1]; Winchelsea [1]; Colac [1]; Warrnambool [1]; Melton [1]; Shepparton[1]; Bacchus Marsh [1]; Ballarat [2]; Beaufort [1]; Maryborough [1]; Macedon [2]; Kangaroo Flat[2]; Euroa[2]; Kilmore East [2]; Broadford [2]; Seymour[2]; Corio [1,2]; North Shore[2]; Ardeer[2]</p>

b) Progress to demonstrate how the boarding ramp gradients are being improved at each station.

As part of V/Line's annual works program, accessibility improvements have been made over the life of the exemption period, at platforms to support the deployment of boarding ramps at several stations on the V/Line network, including:

- Little River Station: platform two at Little River Station has been upgraded to improve safety and to address a significant height gap between the train and platform. This improvement means ramps can now be deployed at any point on the platform.
- Ballarat Line: Crews completed a \$26.6 million package of works at Ballarat Station in mid-2023. This package of works included platform and track works through the station to help make it easier for passengers to board and disembark from trains.
- Deer Park Station: Brand new elevated platforms (one and two) have been constructed at Deer Park Station. Each is accessible by stairs, ramp, and elevator, including new tactiles.

c) Actual expenditure on the required works at each station in the last 12 months, expressed as a dollar figure and as a percentage of total operating budget.

As described above, V/Line is improving accessibility on parts of the network, including on platforms that support the deployment of boarding ramps. Given these upgrades make up part of the overall program of works, actual expenditure is not easily calculable.

d) The measures in place to ensure communication of assisted access to service users.

Platforms at V/Line stations have a Boarding Assistance Zone (BAZ) identified by a ground stencil on each platform. Passengers with accessibility needs can wait in the BAZ for the conductor.

Conductors will assist passengers waiting in the BAZ to board a train and provide other relevant boarding information. The conductor will also be responsible for deploying a boarding ramp if required or requested by a passenger. The boarding assistance decal has been installed on all V/Line station platforms. If a passenger using a mobility device is unable to ascend the boarding ramp due to the gradient, the conductor will organise alternative transport in line with V/Line procedures.

V/Line frontline customer services staff, when present at a station, are also able to inform passengers about the boarding procedure and assist, where appropriate.

Passengers can also contact the PTV call centre to discuss their requirements if they are using mobility aid devices.

Passengers can find further information about boarding ramps on the V/Line website *Accessibility* page in the *Wheelchair and mobility aid access* section:

e) The safety procedures and staff training in place to ensure the safe and timely evacuation of people with disability from these locations during an

emergency.**Safety procedures**

V/Line has a positive duty to eliminate discrimination on its services, as far as possible. It takes positive steps to do so via its conductors, who assist passengers with accessibility needs during their journey. The conductors' duties extend to assisting passengers with accessibility needs during the following:

- Evacuation when a train is at a station;
- Evacuation when a train is between stations (detraining procedure); and
- Duties during delay and disruption.

Emergency response plans have been developed for each corridor to identify all relevant personnel and specific procedure applicable at each station.

Staff training

All V/Line conductors undergo specialised training at the commencement of their employment during a five-week course, which includes the following modules:

- General customer service training;
- Disability awareness;
- Communication access training including a face-to-face session with personnel from external training provider, SCOPE;
- Hidden Disabilities Sunflower;
- Diversity and Inclusion e-Learning modules; and
- Incident response procedure.

Conductors are specifically briefed during their training period on the procedures for the following situations:

- *'Assisting Customers with Accessibility Needs'*;
- *'Assist Conductor and Conductor Handovers'*;
- *'Conductor and Customer Service Manager Duties During a Delay or Disruption'*;
- *'Evacuating Customers from a Train when not at a Platform'*;
- *'Emergency Evacuation of Customers from a Train – Conductor Incapacitated'*;
- *'Deployment of the Boarding Ramp'*;
- *'The Running of Heavily Patronised Trains'*; and
- *'Ticketing Interactions Between Conductors and Customers'*.

Conductors also receive two weeks on-the-job training with senior conductors, when they are mentored through various duties.

Refresher training courses are run for conductors annually. V/Line staff can also view accessibility training material on the V/Line intranet at any time.

Conductors and frontline customer service staff receive disability awareness and communication access training. V/Line is accredited with the Communication Access Symbol, meaning staff are able to effectively communicate with passengers, and communication tools are available to help staff communicate and better understand passengers with communication disabilities. V/Line is also a member of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program.

The ARA member utilising this exemption makes these plans and reports available on its website throughout the exemption period.

V/Line will provide an update on its progress via its exemption report, which is to be updated on an annual basis.

The report will be available on V/Line's website: <https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/Accessibility>

Any ARA member utilising this exemption provides free travel for any assistant accompanying a person with disability who requires assistance to use the ramps between 1 in 8 and 1 in 4 and publicises the free travel arrangements:

V/Line accepts the Victorian Companion Card on all of its services and provides free travel for companions and carers, who hold a Companion Card.

Information is provided on the V/Line website *Accessibility* page, which links to the Victorian Government Companion Card webpage, where passengers can apply for the card and find information on how to use it (Figure 1).



Companion Card

The Victorian Companion Card is accepted on all V/Line services. It offers free travel for companions and carers travelling with a cardholder.

Figure 1: Link to Companion Card - <https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/Accessibility>

Conductors are aware of Companion Card requirements and will provide advice to passengers and their companion and/or carer when meeting them on the platform.

Exemptions Details: Transport Standards 8.2

Exemptions from the Transport Standards 8.2 when boarding devices must be provided.

Temporary Exemption: Existing rail conveyances

For a period of five years, an access path is only required at a single door of existing rail conveyances, subject to the following conditions:

Equivalent access is provided at an alternative door of the rail conveyance, including clear communication of the method for signalling for staff assistance if required at the equivalent access location, in the following circumstances:

- a) if an allocated space is not available;
- b) to ensure access to unique facilities, including an accessible bathroom (where provided), or
- c) to ensure a passenger can both board and alight the rail conveyance.

Reporting Requirements

Equivalent access is provided at an alternative door of the rail conveyance, including clear communication of the method for signalling for staff assistance if required at the equivalent access location, in the following circumstances:

- a) if an allocated space is not available
- b) to ensure access to unique facilities, including an accessible bathroom (where provided), or
- c) to ensure a passenger can both board and alight the rail conveyance

Platforms at V/Line stations have a Boarding Assistance Zone (BAZ) identified by a ground stencil on each platform.

Passengers with accessibility needs are able to wait in the BAZ for a conductor. Conductors will assist passengers waiting in the BAZ to board a train and provide other relevant boarding information, such as alternative entry points. The conductor will also be responsible for deploying a boarding ramp if required or requested by a passenger.

The boarding assistance decal has been installed on all V/Line station platforms.

Any ARA member utilising the exemption ensures that service users can obtain information about specified boarding points at any particular rail station or infrastructure, including information about the way passengers can signal for assistance from staff if required at any equivalent access location:

- a) at any platform at which there is a specified boarding point, including at any equivalent access location.
- b) via the ARA members' websites and downloadable fact sheets
- c) in person at travel centres, where they exist.
- d) via a telephone call to the customer contact centre, where available, and
- e) via any other forms of communication provided by the ARA member (such as a mobile application)

V/Line passengers can find information about how they can receive assistance for their journey on-site and through various information channels.

Boarding Assistance Zone

Passengers with accessibility needs can wait at the demarcated BAZ at each V/Line platform, where they will be approached by a conductor who will provide them with direct assistance and escort them to the accessible door, near the available allocated spaces. Conductors can also provide information regarding boarding points and how to signal for assistance. All V/Line operated platforms have signage present on the platform to indicate the location of the BAZ.

V/Line website

The *Accessibility* page on V/Line website (<https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/Accessibility>) provides passengers with accessibility needs, relevant information about

the accessibility features available to them, and explains the direct assistance procedure. Passengers can also take virtual 3D tours of specific stations.

Passengers can familiarise themselves with the layout of the accessible carriages on their booked service by viewing the map diagram and taking a virtual 3D tour on the On board section of the V/Line web page: <https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/On-board>.

Customer information desks

At staffed stations, passengers can receive assistance and education from V/Line staff at the Customer Information Desk. Assistance may include directing passengers to the BAZ so that the conductor onboard can provide additional boarding assistance support, or organise alternative transport if and when required.

Customer call centre

Passengers with accessibility needs can call the PTV call centre on 1800 800 007 to ask any questions about the service or discuss their specific needs.

Any ARA member utilising this exemption ensures that assistance is provided at each station at all times that the station is operating in deploying the assisted boarding device for passengers who require assistance boarding and alighting a rail conveyance without the requirement for passengers to book or make prior arrangements for assistance.

Passengers with accessibility needs are encouraged to approach station staff during operating hours to discuss their accessibility requirements.

At stations with no customer service desk, passengers with accessibility needs can wait for the train to arrive and receive direct assistance from the conductor onboard the train. All V/Line train services have conductors onboard to provide such assistance.

Passengers do not need to pre-book to receive direct assistance but they can do so online or through the customer call center if they wish to.

Any ARA member utilising the exemption provides a report to the Commission and the ARA within 12 months of the grant of this exemption on:

- a) **The number of conveyances over which this exemption is claimed, including the relevant mode of rail travel.**

During the current reporting period, the temporary exemption is claimed for the following V/Line rail conveyances:

- N-Set: 8
- Sprinters: 21
- VLocity: 118

VLocity trains currently provide passengers with accessibility needs a minimum of two accessible doors to board and alight from at any time.

- b) **The number of stations where an assisted boarding device is provided only at a single door of any conveyance consistent with this exemption.**

During the current reporting period, the temporary exemption is claimed for all the V/Line stations.

- c) **The measures taken to ensure that staff and passengers are adequately informed of:**

- i. **the doors of rail conveyances at which boarding devices are available, and**
- ii. **the equivalent access measures available, including how passengers can signal for assistance from staff at the equivalent access location.**

The international access symbol has been installed on all accessible doors of the V/Line fleet (Image 1).



Image 1: International accessibility sign on VLocity train door

The conductor will come and meet passengers with accessibility needs on the platform (at the

Boarding Assistance Zone) and escort them to the relevant accessible doors. Passengers with accessibility needs can also approach any V/Line staff member at a staffed station and ask for assistance.

Passengers can notify V/Line of their boarding ramp requirement at the booking stage on the V/Line website, which will then be conveyed to the conductor on the scheduled service. Passengers can check the type of rolling stock scheduled for their journey through the online booking page or on the V/Line App, in order to help determine their accessibility requirements.

Passengers can also find more information about the layout and location of the allocated spaces in the specified train type from the *On board* page of the V/Line website <https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/On-board>.

Passengers can view overall train layout, the location of the allocated space and other accessible features on a map diagram, as well as take a virtual tour of each fleet type.

- d) The safety procedures and staff training in place for the safe and timely evacuation of people with disability from conveyances at locations where an assisted boarding device is only provided at a single door of a conveyance in the event of a need to evacuate, including an emergency.**

V/Line's direct assistance procedure is supported by multiple internal procedures, including:

- *‘Assisting Customers with Accessibility Needs’;*
- *‘Assist Conductor and Conductor Handovers’;*
- *‘Conductor and Customer Service Manager Duties During a Delay or Disruption’;*
- *‘Evacuating Customers from a Train when not at a Platform’;*
- *‘Emergency Evacuation of Customers from a Train – Conductor Incapacitated’;*
- *‘Deployment of the Boarding Ramp’;*
- *‘The Running of Heavily Patronised Trains’;* and
- *‘Ticketing Interactions Between Conductors and Customers’.*

These procedures cover normal and emergency procedures and provide specific protocols for staff to provide assistance to passengers with accessibility requirements during the respective operations.

Conductors undergo specialised training during a five-week course at the start of their employment, which covers emergency situations and incident response procedures. A module also focuses on how to deploy the boarding ramp safely for passengers. Conductors have an opportunity to practice the boarding ramp procedure during their two week on-the-job training following the initial five-week course.

- e) Measures taken to ensure that assistance is provided to passengers at each station at all times the railway is operating, whether by the driver of the conveyance or by ensuring sufficient staff are available at stations to assist passengers through the deployment of the assisted boarding device, the number of staff at each station and the roles in which they are employed, and the planned and actual expenditure incurred in implementing these measures, expressed as a dollar figure and as a percentage**

of total budget.

All V/Line services have at least one conductor onboard, who provides direct assistance to passengers as required.

The conductor provides assistance in line with the following protocols:

- approach passengers waiting in the Boarding Assistance Zone on a platform;
- discuss their requirements directly with them for their journey and support required from V/Line;
- escort passengers to the available allocated spaces / priority seats on the train where required;
- deploy the boarding ramp where required;
- show passengers the location of the assistance call button on the train in case they require further assistance during the journey;
- log a Tally App destination station, which will provide the conductor with a timely reminder that a passenger requires assistance to alight at the next station;
- assist passengers with accessibility needs to alight the train and deploy boarding ramp if required; and
- provide any additional information when required.

As at April 2024, V/Line employs more than 300 conductors across each of the V/Line corridors to ensure each train operates with a minimum of one conductor to provide customer service and assistance.

There are also approximately 300 station staff located at more than 50 staffed stations across the network, to help assist passengers waiting on a platform for a train service. The current V/Line procedure, therefore, ensures assistance is provided to passengers at each station.

As these measures are part of V/Line's customer service expenditure has not been expressed.

The ARA member utilising this exemption makes these plans and reports available on its website throughout the exemption period.

V/Line will provide an update on its progress via its exemption report, which is to be updated on an annual basis.

The report will be available on V/Line's website: <https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/Accessibility>

The ARA member utilising this exemption provides de-identified reports to the Commission on any complaints made to it or an external agency (of which the ARA member is aware) alleging a failure in the provision of access, including equivalent access. The report should identify the station that was the subject of the complaint.

Reports relevant to this exemption condition are provided to the Commission separately to this report.