

Optimization of the Current Design Practice for Differently Able Road Facilities in Sri Lanka-Case Study

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We all have a social obligation to respect the rights of our fellow human beings. Even if some people may lack certain abilities we all share same needs and expectations. People having disabilities have to spend the entire life struggling with their physique itself and might not have the freedom to stand for their own rights. Thus as people with fewer difficulties we have duty to stand beside them and support them.

Accessibility protects the basic rights of a human being such as the right to receive facilities like healthcare, education and the right to do an occupation to earn one's live etc. Therefore, it is essential to develop a barrier free road environment that guarantees accessibility for all.

Disabled accessibility is not a new concept to the world. There are many related codes and practices in other countries. Sri Lanka has recently introduced this concept to the road infrastructure by improving the Bambalapitiya – Kollupitiya road section as disabled friendly by following guidelines given in *the Gazette of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (No 1,467/15-17/10/2006)*.

In this case study the newly introduced road facility was checked for its suitability for the country considering social and economic aspects. It was checked whether the design fulfils the intended purpose. Two visually impaired people participated in this study. They were asked to walk along the tactile guide way so that their behavior can be observed. Comments were taken from them regarding their personal experience and ideas for further improvement. In order to make decisions, further knowledge was gained through several sources such as the educational video "Pathway to independence" a product of "Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired" and also from documents such as *RTS 14 Guidelines, ESCWA design manual, TRL Overseas Road Note 21*.

Several problems were identified from the study of new facility. Most importantly when compared with guidelines which have been followed, there were deviations of construction due to faulty workmanship. It was obvious that the guidelines have been prepared neither with proper understanding of differently abled people nor the suitability of the design for our country. After considering all these facts, the author was able to modify some guidelines and even come up with new ones. New layouts were introduced to the pedestrian walkway.

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