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Standing Committee on Transport
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street

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Submission to the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services

Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Fix My Street

Submitted by: Guide Dogs NSW/ACT

Date: 22nd August 2025

Introduction

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street. As a leading provider of services to and advocacy for people with low vision or blindness across the ACT and NSW, we are deeply invested in ensuring that public infrastructure and reporting systems are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all community members.

Summary of Concerns

Having an accessible way to report issues in the built environment is essential to keeping the ACT community safe and inclusive for everyone. However, our Clients frequently face barriers when trying to use the Fix My Street platform to report access and safety they experience. These barriers include:

- **Delayed responses.** Clients have reported that issues submitted via Fix My Street often remain unacknowledged and unaddressed for weeks or months, leaving hazards in place and public spaces unsafe.
- **Digital accessibility challenges.** The Access Canberra Portal and Fix My Street reporting forms are difficult to use with screen readers and other

assistive technologies. Some Clients have said they give up part way through attempting to log a request because of the accessibility barriers, the process has been described as too complex to complete, they have needed to ask other people to complete it on their behalf due to challenges, or they have stopped trying to resolve issues altogether as they feel it is 'too hard. Key buttons and form fields are not correctly labelled for screen readers, drop down menus are overly complex, and the log in process is inaccessible. These design flaws prevent people who use assistive technologies from independently submitting reports. This is not just a usability issue, it represents a failure to provide equal access to public services and effectively excludes people from participating in civic feedback and safe reporting.

- **Lack of feedback:** Clients report inconsistent experiences with confirmation and follow-up, making it difficult to know whether their concerns have been received, acknowledged, plan to be resolved or are resolved.
- **No response to alternative reporting methods:** Clients have noted that issues submitted via third-party apps such as [Snap, Send, Solve](#) go unanswered. This is particularly concerning given that many Clients are familiar with and regularly use this app within NSW to report issues in their local government areas (LGA).

Case Examples

- **Obstructed and damaged footpaths:** Clients have told us that footpaths are often blocked or unsafe to use but reporting and achieving resolution is very difficult. Common issues include e-scooters abandoned across walkways, overgrown vegetation, vehicles parked on footpaths, construction fencing and works and business signage. These obstacles make it difficult to move around safely, especially for people with low vision or blindness. In one case, a Client submitted multiple reports about a damaged footpath in their local area, but the issue remained unresolved for over six weeks. This forced the Client to take an alternative route that

was significantly longer and unfamiliar, making a routine journey both stressful and unsafe.

- **Lighting challenges:** Sufficient street lighting is essential for people with low vision to navigate safely, find their way and reduce feelings of vulnerability. Last year, a Client in Holt reported that streetlights were out at an intersection on Starke Street, submitting three separate reports before the issue was finally resolved three months later. Each request was lodged by their wife, as the Client was unable to independently access the Fix My Street forms due to incompatibility with their screen reading software. This delay not only impacted their mobility but also heightened feelings of vulnerability and exclusion.
- **Audio Tactile Push Buttons (ATPB's):** These devices at signalised crossings provide auditory, visual, and vibrotactile cues to support safe navigation for pedestrians who are blind or have low vision. A Client reported that the audio component of the ATPB at the Civic bus interchange on Northbourne Avenue was not functioning properly. Despite lodging the issue via Fix My Street, it remained unresolved for six weeks.

Client and Guide Dog Handler Dan describes the impact of inaccessible reporting systems:

“As a blind person, I already face daily challenges navigating footpaths that are unsafe or inaccessible. But when the systems designed to report these issues are themselves inaccessible, it sends a message - my voice doesn't matter. This exclusion not only undermines my right to participate equally in my community, but also erodes trust in public systems that are meant to serve everyone”

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Snapshot Audit of Fix My Street

To better understand the digital accessibility challenges reported by Clients, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT conducted a snapshot audit of the Fix My Street platform. This audit

was supported by digital accessibility consulting agency Hassell Inclusion, and followed a structured workflow:

1. Locate the correct page to log a request using both a mobile phone and a laptop via internet search.
2. Follow the steps to 'Submit a Fix My Street Request', including creating a user account.
3. Log a request to fix tactile ground surface indicators (TGSIs) outside 117 Nemarang Crescent, Waramanga.
4. Review the automated confirmation email sent after submission.

The audit involved accessing both the digital account setup and the Fix My Street reporting form. The account creation process was notably more problematic from an accessibility perspective, presenting significant barriers for users relying on assistive technologies.

A summary of the audit findings was shared with representatives from Fix My Street and the ACT Government in February 2025, both in conversation and via email. This summary is attached as Appendix 1.

Recommendations

To improve the accessibility, responsiveness, and overall effectiveness of the Fix My Street platform, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT recommends the following actions:

1. **Conduct a comprehensive accessibility audit:** Undertake a full WCAG 2.1 compliance audit of the Fix My Street platform, including manual testing with assistive technologies. Implement necessary upgrades to ensure the platform is fully accessible to people with low vision or blindness.
2. **Explore alternative or complementary reporting platforms:** Consider establishing a new reporting system or integrating existing platforms such as Snap, Send, Solve which are already familiar to many users. Accessibility must be a core requirement in the selection, or upgrade of any system.
3. **Implement a priority response system for safety hazards:** Develop a transparent triage process that prioritises reports affecting vulnerable road users, including people with disabilities. This should include clear criteria and timeframes for addressing high-risk issues.

4. **Introduce an accessible feedback and notification mechanism:**
Ensure users receive confirmation when a report is submitted and as it progresses, regardless of how the feedback is lodged. This system must be accessible to all users, including those using screen readers or other assistive technologies.
5. **Co-design and user testing:** Review current procurement and maintenance policies to ensure co-design and user testing is embedded.
6. **Review monitoring and surveillance prioritisation schedule:** Active monitoring of road and footpath condition should be coordinated by ACT Government in residential areas. Current processes rely on people reporting issues, rather than applying antecedent control to avoid issues becoming an access barrier or safety hazard. This puts the onus and risk on people with disability. If people can't get out their front door because of a barrier, they aren't able to access essential services in business and city districts. A recommendation is that six monthly residential 'Fix My District' weeks are introduced where residents, local volunteer groups and ACT Government staff are encouraged to report issues that may impact vulnerable residents in that area.
7. **Strengthen accessibility testing practices:** Move beyond reliance on automated accessibility testing tools (such as WAVE), which often fail to detect the majority of accessibility errors. To ensure compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992), the ACT Government should implement manual testing by engineers with accessibility expertise, user testing involving people with lived experience of disability and ongoing consultation with accessibility specialists during platform updates and redesigns.

Conclusion

Fix My Street has the potential to be a powerful tool for civic engagement and safety. However, without deliberate attention to accessibility and responsiveness, it risks excluding those who rely on safe, navigable public spaces the most. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT urges the Committee to consider these recommendations and work

towards a more inclusive and effective system

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence or participate in future consultations.

About Guide Dogs NSW/ACT:

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is the leading provider of specialist orientation and mobility services, supports and training across NSW & ACT. We have expertise in understanding and supporting people who are blind or have low vision to access the community safely and independently and live the life of their choosing.

In addition to providing individual supports, equipment and training, we have a significant access advisory and advocacy focus. Our expert assessments and advice is provided to individuals, businesses and government through participation on panels such as Australian Standards, Accessibility Reference Group in Canberra, the Accessible Transport Advisory Committee (ATAC) with Transport for NSW and numerous other private and public forums.

We have a particular interest in accessible and inclusive design for people who are blind or have low vision, and the implementation of these practices in public places, spaces and services.

About our Clients:

According to Vision 2020, there are approximately 575 000 people with low vision or blindness currently living in Australia with 70% over 65. We have provided services to approximately 3000 people with low vision or blindness over the past year across NSW and the ACT. According to a 2023 survey, 96% of Clients reported access barriers in the community.

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This submission has been endorsed by Canberra Blind Society, via President Heather Fitzpatrick.



Appendix 1

Fix My Street - snapshot audit

Executive Summary

A snapshot audit of the "Fix My Street" website, conducted by [Hassel Inclusion](#) and commissioned by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, reveals significant accessibility and usability issues. While designed to allow users to report local issues, including footpath concerns which was a key advocacy issue highlighted leading into the ACT Election, the site fails to meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards. These barriers prevent many users, particularly those with disabilities, from effectively using the service, undermining its purpose. We urge the ACT Government to implement urgent improvements within six months to ensure an inclusive and accessible reporting mechanism for all.

Key Findings

Accessibility failures

- The site does not comply with WCAG 2.1 AA standards, making it difficult to use for people with disability.
- Structural, content, and coding issues hinder usability for individuals relying on assistive technologies.
- Major issues include:
 - Improper heading markup and descriptive links, affecting screen reader navigation.

- Low colour contrast, making elements difficult to perceive.
- Missing or inaccurate input field labels, making account creation inaccessible.
- Inaccessible error messages, preventing users from identifying and fixing issues.
- Unclear verification and two-factor authentication (2FA), excluding assistive technology users.

Account creation & login process

- Overly complex signup process with wordy and confusing form fields.
- Error messages lack clear, actionable guidance.
- Screen readers do not announce password setup requirements, creating barriers.
- Poor colour contrast on the ACT digital account page reduces readability.

Navigation & user experience

- Inconsistent heading structures complicate screen reader navigation.
- Buttons and links lack uniform styling, leading to confusion.
- Convoluted reporting process with unintuitive design.
- Icons and symbols lack text labels, making interpretation difficult for non-visual users.

Form accessibility

- Forms lack proper labels, making them difficult to complete using assistive technologies.
- Error messages are unclear and unhelpful, failing to guide users to resolve input errors.
- Feedback and complaints processes are difficult to access and navigate, discouraging users from reporting issues.

Recommendations

1. Improve accessibility compliance
 - Implement WCAG 2.1 AA-compliant heading structures, descriptive links, and tabular data.
 - Improve colour contrast to meet accessibility guidelines.

- Label all input fields accurately for screen reader users.
 - Ensure error messages are clear, accessible, and provide meaningful guidance.
 - Make two-factor authentication (2FA) and verification fully accessible.
2. Improve usability & user experience
- Simplify account creation and provide screen reader-friendly password guidance.
 - Standardise button and link styling to improve usability.
 - Streamline the issue reporting process for a more intuitive user journey.
 - Add text labels to icons and symbols to enhance understanding.
3. Strengthen feedback & complaints mechanism
- Make the complaints section more accessible and user-friendly.
 - Provide clear step-by-step instructions for submitting complaints.
 - Ensure users receive a reference number for tracking complaints and progress updates.

Call to Action

The ACT Government must act immediately to remove accessibility barriers and ensure "Fix My Street" is inclusive for all users. We recommend the following steps:

- Commit to a comprehensive accessibility overhaul within six months.
- Engage with accessibility experts and users with disabilities to guide improvements.
- Provide regular progress updates, including implementation timelines.
- Conduct ongoing user testing with individuals relying on assistive technologies.

Quotes

- "People can be disabled by their experience in using it. People can be disabled by the technology that they are using."
- "A government organisation should be conducting sufficient user research, testing across a variety of devices to ensure accessibility for all."
- "The process of signing up for an account is highly problematic. The form is overly verbose and confusing."

- "The colour contrast of the text is problematic, it's just not high enough for some people to see."
- "Not having proper headings on the page is a clear WCAG failure."

Ensuring digital accessibility is not just a legal requirement, it is a fundamental right. We urge the ACT Government to take swift action and lead by example in creating a truly inclusive digital experience for all.

This audit was conducted by [Hassell Inclusion](#), lead by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

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