

Changes in industry make travelling easier for disabled

A major challenge for Canada's tourism industry in 1981 — International Year of Disabled Persons — is to accelerate measures already started to help accommodate physically handicapped travellers.

"Handicapped people want to travel. In the hard core marketing and business sense, there is a market here," said Denis Barry of the Travel Industry Association of Canada.

Travel agents

While few travel agents have yet acquired experience in dealing with physically-handicapped clients, their growing awareness was evident at a recent Alliance of Canadian Travel Associations (ACTA) seminar concerning disabled people and travel. Problems experienced by physically-handicapped travellers were discussed and suggestions made to help agents work more effectively with such clients.

Cinnie Noble and Boyd Haan are two Toronto travel agents who have worked extensively with disabled people.

Haan's first involvement was with a group of disabled athletes. While he says that extra time and effort are required to ensure a successful trip for handicapped travellers, he adds "we find our arrangements for a group of physically disabled

travellers are much more appreciated".

Noble, involved with handicapped travellers since 1976, agrees that arrangements for handicapped clients require extensive and time consuming pre-trip work, and that this poses a problem for travel agents working on commission. But, she adds, the time element could be reduced if agents knew the appropriate questions to ask. To this end, she is working on a manual containing relevant questions and other information designed to reduce the time involved in processing disabled clients.

Haan and Noble belong to ASSIST (Association for Specialized Services Involving Special Travellers), a committee of the Ontario Travel Industry Conference. Formed in 1978 to advance travel opportunities for physically disabled people, ASSIST members include travel agents, tour operators, airline personnel and consumers.

Trains and planes

Within the passenger rail and airline industries substantial improvements have already been made to make travel more accessible to disabled persons.

A recent Department of Transport review of airport services resulted in authorization of \$2.2 million to upgrade existing facilities within three years. Air terminals built since 1973 have been designed with disabled people in mind.

Following complaints about inconsistent policies by air carriers towards disabled travellers, the Air Transport Association of Canada (ATAC) developed a set of standardized guidelines which were recently accepted by all major Canadian airlines.

ATAC executive vice-president Harry Pickard said the guidelines were designed to free disabled travellers as much as possible from the need to travel with an attendant. They clearly define which passengers may travel unaccompanied, which must have an attendant, and the number of disabled passengers *per flight*.

In June 1980, Nordair became the first Canadian airline to provide safety and in-flight information in braille.

A few months later, Air Canada became the first Canadian air carrier to equip its reservation service with an electronic teletype system for speech- and hearing-impaired people. The system is operating

on a trial basis in Montreal and Regina and, pending results, may be expanded to other Air Canada reservation offices.

A major milestone in rail travel for disabled persons was realized in April 1980 when the Canadian Transport Commission (CTC) issued a decision requiring VIA Rail to offer passage to all self-reliant handicapped persons. VIA was also instructed to provide manual lifting of wheelchair passengers at 13 major stations across the country.

VIA has complied with the CTC requirements and has instituted a special program for handicapped travellers. Special advisor D'Arcy O'Connell, himself a wheelchair user, outlined the Crown corporation's \$18-million, five-year special needs program. Under the program, he said, VIA staff have been trained to lift wheelchairs, brochures in braille have been produced and about 40 railway stations are being modified. Research is under-way on mechanical wheelchair lifts for new or modified railway cars, as well as on interior designs which will better accommodate transportation-handicapped passengers. Also, VIA's computerized reservation system now allows people with speech or hearing problems to communicate through teletype or Bell Canada's Visual Ear system.

The challenge for the 1980s, beginning with the International Year of Disabled Persons, is to further advance the travel opportunities for handicapped people and to ensure that disabled travellers are treated with the same consistency and dignity as able-bodied ones.

(From Canada Tourism, December 1980-January 1981.)

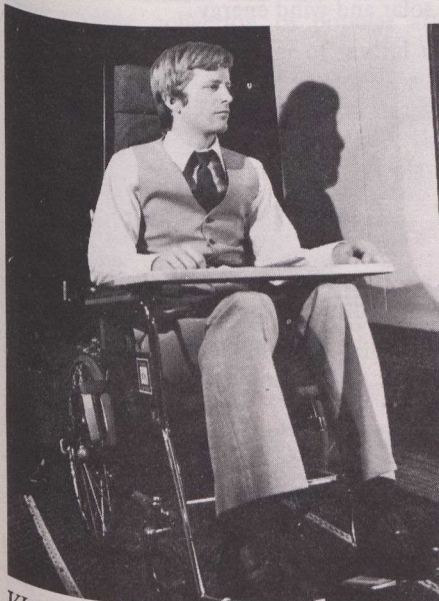
Fisheries grants awarded

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has awarded its 1981 research grants to scientists at 17 Canadian universities.

The grants, worth \$360,000 in biological, oceanographic and socio-economic fields, are designed to encourage university-participation in fisheries, marine and aquatic research.

The average grant is for \$9,700 and 12 new research programs are being assisted this year.

Current research emphasis is in fish population changes, ecosystem relationships, ocean pollution, diseases of aquatic organisms and fish quality improvement.



VIA Rail's (light, rapid and comfortable) trains will have special securing mechanisms which will allow disabled passengers to remain in their wheelchairs by ensuring that the chairs do not roll.