Case Study – Savidor Station, Tel Aviv, Israel Rail Services.

Improving Way finding in Rail Stations.

Overview

Savidor is the central train station in Tel Aviv. The station includes a large bus depot and taxi center to the main business, leisure and academic centers of central Tel Aviv and three surrounding cities.
Blind and low vision travelers are eligible for free travel on the Bus and Train networks and the station is a main artery, both for changing lines as well as access to other transport networks.
The station has 4 platforms in close proximity to each other. Platforms 1 & 2, Southbound and platforms 3 & 4, Northbound. In addition there are two major exits to the station; one to the Ramat Gan Business area and one to Central Tel Aviv, the bus depot and Taxi pick up points.

Within the station between the platforms is an information desk (see image below) providing information on connection times, arrivals and departures. Due to the proximity of the platforms, Blind and low vision travelers need help in finding the correct platforms. A quick connection is made more difficult due to way finding obstacles, the need to find the information desk, wait in line and then be shown the way to the platform. The station authority had received many complaints by Blind and Low Vision travelers.

Objectives

To assist the passengers who are Visually Impaired or Blind to find the correct platform safely and in a timely manner to ensure the passenger catches the right train from the right platform at the right time.

To offer the Visually Impaired and Blind passengers to the Savidor Station the best customer service and assistance.

How does the system operate?

The Step-Hear^{tm} system consists of two parts: an indoor/outdoor transmitter base (SH-200) installed at the information desk and a personal activator (SH-220) carried by Blind and Visually Impaired travelers. The SH-220 activators are available for purchase in Israel at the Blind and Low Vision centers. To date about 200 activators have been sold in the Tel Aviv area alone.

When in the pre-set range (10 meters) of the transmitter, the traveler is notified of its presence through the buzzing and/or beeping of the activator. Pressing a button on the activator triggers a pre-recorded message in the base installed at the Information Desk.

Information relayed from the base

1. Serves as an audio compass, directing the user towards the Information Desk.

2. Provides directional information towards the 4 different platforms and the destinations required.

3. Informs the Desk Staff that a Blind or Low Vision traveler is in the immediate vicinity and may need assistance.

Areas of Consideration

Audio signage was the preferred method chosen by the Rail Authority due to its ability to transmit information, act as a navigational tool and alert Platform staff in a manner which prevented additional delays, removed obstacles and met safety standards all in one.

Feedback

The system was installed in September 2010. On installation the Blind and Low Vision centers selling the SH-220 activators were notified and they in turn added it to the publicized list of Step-Hear installations.
The Station authority has received five letters of thanks from travelers in addition to being asked to install the system at the entrances and exits to the stations and other stations with similar layouts.

Blind employee at Tel Aviv District Courts
“the system has allowed me to reach in greater confidence the platform areas at the station”
“I also received quicker and better service from the staff at the Information desk”

Who was Involved

Step-Hear worked closely with the Station authority and an accredited accessibility consultant on the position of the unit and context of the messages. In addition the Tel Aviv center for the Blind & Vision Impaired was used to inform on the installation to potential users.

Conclusion

With the positive response received the Rail Authority is planning expansion of Step-Hear^{tm} in all of its stations nationally. The determining factors for use of the system cited by the Blind and Visually impaired has been its ease of use, the early-warning feature alerting the user of a potential facility in the vicinity and the one for all universality of the system with Step-Hear bases being installed at bus-stops, medical centers, shopping malls, ATM machines, banks and a growing list of additional sites.

Step-Hear^{tm} systems make dramatic changes in the lives of Blind and Visually Impaired people by enabling the independent use of services not previously available to them.

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