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How Can the Crippled Government Process Serve Person With Disabilities?

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Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation bus (Photo from Wikipedia/Flickr)

Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) provides a discounted price bus pass for Persons With Disabilities (PWD) in Maharashtra. Although one has to go through quite a strenuous process to obtain the pass, the scheme is beneficial for PWDs and providing vital savings in transport. Apart from routine travel it also allows them to visit places of tourist attraction across the State with relatively little money. This is their chance to step outside of their home and explore the world, opportunities which often do not come easily to PWD. Therefore, the “One-Fourth Pass” or 75% discount on the travel pass is widely popular and sought after among the PWD community. While the scheme looks to reach the most disadvantaged of the PWD community, there are multiple challenges one must face while obtaining the State Transport One Fourth Pass (STOFP). Simplifying the process, a breakdown of the steps to get the STOFP is outlined here:

Before we get into the list of the necessary documents, it would be important to clarify that the below list of documents do not exclusively need for STOFFP. You can use the same documents for other schemes. Having an Aadhar card can be used for various other purposes as an ID card.

The first pre-requisite for being eligible for the STOFFP is that you must be “certified” to be a PWD. PWD are only eligible for the welfare scheme when they have a Disability Certificate (DC) from a civil hospital. For Pune district, people can visit Aundh or Sassoon hospital. After you get the DC with “a benchmark disability” by The Disability Act of 1995. 40% and above lets you qualify for welfare schemes for PWD of Central and State Government. In short, you must be a PWD with a DC, with at or above 40% disability.

The second and arguably the most important step is to get yourself an Aadhar Card, or any other state-approved Identity Card which is useful whenever asked for ID Proof. The importance of an Aadhar Card cannot be forgotten since it is required in all the important paperwork. If you do not have it, please visit the nearest Maha-E-Seva Kendra.

The third step is to get a photocopy of the Ration Card. Generally, if you live in rural part of the country, your family gets a “Ration Card” on which base families get their ration (government aided low-cost everyday food such as rice, wheat, *daal*, and maybe sugar on a monthly basis). If you do not have it then please get it. Start talking with your *Gramsevak* or *Sarpanch*. S/he will direct you accordingly.

The fourth step is to have a Birth Certificate. Generally, this is a fairly easy document to get but in villages, it can be challenging. It is proof that provides the domicile information of your birth and your age.

The fifth is to get a couple of passport size photos.

Next, the PWD has to visit the nearest Maha-E-Seva Kendra and connect her/ his phone number to an Aadhar Card. This makes subsequent verification processes easier. It is also useful to keep Pan Card, Voting Card, School Leaving Certificate, and such other documents handy as one can be replaced by the other if necessary.

The final documentation process of getting STOFFP is to go again to Maha-E-Seva Kendra. There, you have to file an application form on [this \(https://aaplesarkar.mahaonline.gov.in/\)](https://aaplesarkar.mahaonline.gov.in/) website of the Maharashtra state government. Here, you will have to create an account and apply for the STOFFP.

Before you begin the online application process, you will have to ensure you have scanned copies of the following documents:

1. Scanned copy of your photograph,
2. Scanned copy of your signature,
3. Scanned copy of Disability Certificate,
4. Scanned copy of Ration Card,
5. Scanned copy of Aadhar Card,
6. Scanned copy of Birth Certificate.

The above-listed documents need to be according to the **size** and **format** that the website states, as otherwise the documents may not be accepted for uploading. At this stage it would help to get assistance from someone who is familiar with the process as doing it by oneself can be very time-consuming. The technical guidance that the experienced Maha-E-Seva Kendra representative has will be useful in this case.

The form is relatively short and easy to fill. Online payment of approximately 25.00 rupees be made for to avail STOFFP service, so ensure you have the requisite net-banking or payment access.

Finally, take the online print of the document which should show the attached list of above-mentioned documents and confirmation of online payment. This is your online STOFFP application form, the sixth document, necessary for the STOFFP application.

Please do not forget that you will also have to pay for getting services from the Maha-E-Seva Kendra representative. For each visit to the Maha-E-Seva Kendra, the cost should be between 300 and 500 rupees.

Now comes the final stage of submitting the paperwork to the Zilla Parishad office, including the following:

1. 2 Photographs,
2. Photocopy of the online STOFFP form,
3. Photocopy of Disability Certificate,
4. Photocopy of Ration Card,
5. Photocopy of Aadhar Card,
6. Photocopy of Birth Certificate.

You will probably have to wait around 15 days to get the STOFFP card ready. After you receive the STOFFP card you will then have to visit the nearest MSRTC office (*ST Aagar*) to get the stamp from the authorities. The stamp does not take a long time, but make sure to get a stamp which also lets your companion (helper) get 50% off from the fare. The rule of getting 50% off to the helper has changed recently from PWD being 100% disabled to 65%. In other words, if a PWD is 65% or above disabled, then the helper gets 50% discount. The general requirement of MSRTC office is below:

1. PWD being present
2. Original Copy of the Disability Certificate
3. Photocopy of the Disability Certificate
4. STOFFP card from Zilla Parishad

Now, imagine you are a PWD living in one of the small hamlets in the mountains of rural Maharashtra, away from the concerned offices with limited road connectivity and access to digital interfaces. You have to visit the government office at block level because *Gramsevak* is not available most of the time in the Gram Panchayat and is preoccupied with other things. To follow

up on these processes the PWD and his/her parents must travel to the various offices and in the process may skip meals occasionally and skip workdays which are essential for farming and daily labor communities. Sometimes, officers might be on the field or off duty, and repeat visits must be made. One wonders how these elaborate processes help, and why a Disability Certificate should not suffice as a single document for concessions on bus, train, etc. Very often, there is a lack of awareness of welfare schemes and new regulations in the system. Legal guardians can come or visit the Zillah Parishad on behalf of the PWD if s/he is 100% disabled. Though, it is in the best interest of PWD to make visits personally with parents or guardians. Thus, leading cause of PWD not getting welfare schemes is not the PWD itself but the broken outreach system where there are great number of hurdles PWD must cross to get welfare schemes. To expect and fulfil every demand is simply unrealistic for PWD and therefore, the crippled system of serving PWD welfare schemes is not able to fully serve the PWD.