



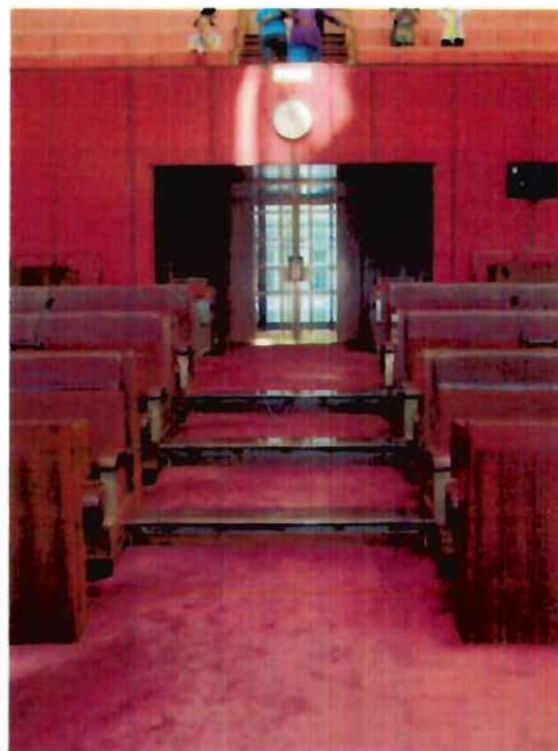
Scott Radburn
 Department of Parliamentary Services
 PO Box 6000
 Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Scott,

Thankyou for enquiring regarding access options for the Senate and House of Representatives chambers, in particular, for wheelchair users who are also Senators or Members. The following provides some options to assist.

Design limitations

The main barrier for wheelchair accessibility is the internal steps, and access to seats on the graduated levels in both chambers.



Options considered such as stair-climbers mounted on the walls of the House of Representatives would not only impact on design integrity, but would only allow access to the advisor's benches, not the members benches. Stair climbers mounted in aisles would present a trip hazard for ambulant members as well as blocking their egress in an emergency situation.

The benches themselves with armrests that do not fold out of the way are also a barrier for a person in a wheelchair attempting to transfer themselves, or be assisted to transfer. A person in a wheelchair transfers to their stronger side, and the double benches limit their position within the chamber. An extremely disabled person in an electric wheelchair may be able to get to a lower level using a stair-climber system or similar wheelchair platform, but without a hoist,

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or other transferring system, they would not be able to access the benches and would need to stay positioned in an aisle-way, which would be a hazard to ambulant people in the event of an emergency evacuation. Even if a hoist were to be used to lift the person onto the bench (assuming arm-rests could be folded out of the way) they would be at risk in the event of an emergency evacuation.

Additionally, the gaps between the benches are between 500mm and 300mm when not a designated aisle-way, which is insufficient for wheelchair access.



Physical limitations

There are also a number of unknowns regarding the wheelchair user. For example, the variables include :

- unilateral weakness or full paralysis, such as a hemiplegia,
- upper limb weakness or paralysis as in quadriplegia,
- some lower limb mobility or none at all,
- ability to independently transfer, or
- requiring an attendant and/or hoist, manual wheelchair user or electronic chair user etc.

Options

Access for a disabled parliamentarian is therefore likely to involve a compromise, as it must be acknowledged that without significant modification (i.e. redesign of both chambers to widen aisles, redesign benches, replace steps with ramps and platforms) a wheelchair user cannot access every seat no matter what equipment is installed.

It is worth considering the issue of reasonable practicability. To amend the building fabric of Parliament House, and add hydraulic wheelchair ramps on each side of each chamber, would involve substantial cost and time to DPS.

If the potential cost is considered against the number of mobility-impaired parliamentarians over the last 20 years; the different preferences of people with respect to access; the possibility that more Members with mobility impairment will enter Federal Parliament; and the suitability of alternative solutions, it may be more practicable to implement a solution involving compromise.

There are a number of possible solutions which involve no change to the building fabric of Parliament House. These are shown at the Addendum. Two which may work for the majority of wheelchair users is a trolley unit (Scalamobil) which fits under the existing wheelchair, or the Hercules Personal Stair-climber (information attached). These have their own limitations, as they cannot be operated by the wheelchair user, necessitating an attendant. The lifting limit of 150kgs on the Scalamobil may also mean that it is not able to be used for electric wheelchairs and bariatric wheelchair users.

Another solution may be **TopChair, a stair climbing wheelchair**. It uses tracks to ride up and down stairs and obstacles without any help of fixed structure like a ramp, In most cases, TopChair can be used without an attendant. I am still ascertaining if TopChair is available within Australia.

Finally, it may be feasible to construct a movable stand-alone bench for each chamber in the same design as the other benches, which could be situated at the top level if suitable. This would allow the bench to be used on either side of the chamber, or along the curved areas to the rear of the chamber. If designed to accept a wheelchair, this would provide ease of access for a mobility-impaired Parliamentarian. It could be fitted with the same items that benches currently have, such as a microphone, pull-out writing platform, an attendant call-button, headphone jack, and a telephone to the member's suite. Further, it could be stored until such time as needed, and might not become obsolete over time in the same way that other solutions possibly could.

Please phone me if you wish to discuss this further.

Regards,

Mandy Richardson
Occupational Therapist
30/3/09

ADDENDUM

Hercules Complete Lifting Solutions Company specialises in solving your lifting problems.

We have distributors throughout Australia so please contact us about any of the products you see here.



We have a range of stairclimbing trolleys with the capability to carry over 1500kg up stairs, these trolleys save labour, injury, time, and money.

At last—its here!
The revolutionary Hercules Personal Stairclimbers which can climb virtually any stairs—straight, curved, spirals, inside or out, and even on wet slippery surfaces.

It quickly packs up into 3 small pieces with the heaviest component weighing just 16kgs.



Hercules Complete Lifting Solutions

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Scalamobil

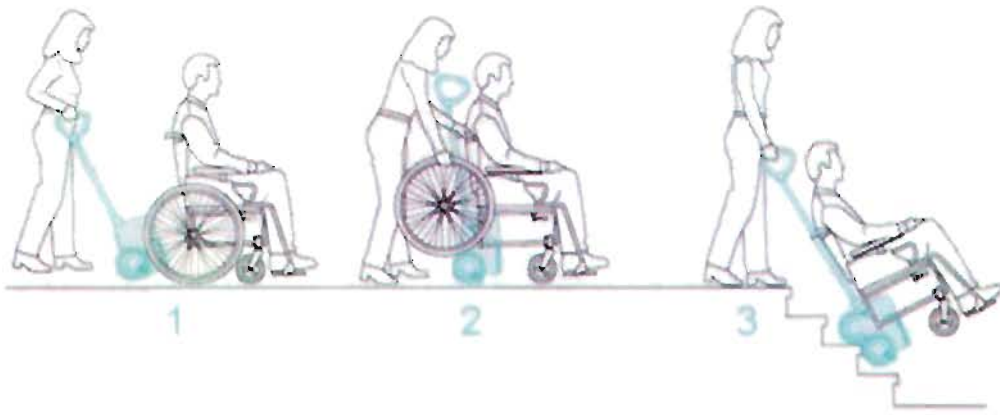


The Scalamobil is a lightweight compact stairclimbing device for wheelchairs that easily manages even narrow and winding stairs. Scalamobil can be adapted to hundreds of brands of wheelchairs as well as to various aids for children. Together with our [Scalachair X3](#) the Scalamobil is also useful for people who are not dependent on a wheelchair, but have problems with climbing stairs of all kinds. It is important to know that handling the Scalamobil does not call for physical strength. Due to its light weight and moderate dimensions, it is a device which is very easy to transport. Easily and quick dismantled it fits in the back of any vehicle.

More Information....

- ✦ [How the Scalamobil works...](#)
- ✦ [Standard wheelchair installation.....](#)
- ✦ [Scalamobil eliminates stairway problems.....](#)
- ✦ [Customised to your needs.....](#)
- ✦ [Practical when traveling.....](#)
- ✦ [Accessories...](#)
- ✦ [Scalaport X6](#)
- ✦ [Scalachair X3](#)

SPECIFICATIONS FOR SCALAMOBIL		
E-Box	Batteries: Range: Operating elements:	2 x 12 volt, 3.4 Ah, leakage-proof and maintenance-free. Up to 300 steps (approx. 20 floors), depending on the weight of occupant. Single-step switching, climbing speed control.
Climbing Unit	Lifting capacity: Step height: Motor nominal output:	Maximum load (occupant plus chair) 120kg. Max. 20cm step height (with the Scalamobil S27SE height increases to 25cm), minimum step depth 11cm. 176 Watt, climbing speed, controllable in 6-16 steps/min.
Handle	Operating elements:	On/Off switch, battery indication, lateral adjustment of the handles. Toggle up/down down switch for climbing stairs.
Battery Charger		With electronic charging and automatic switch-off mechanism.
Weight:	Total weight: Stair climbing unit: Handgrip unit:	24.5kg 19.3kg 5.2kg
Accessories:	Attachment for wheelchair	Head-rest Safety belt Scalaport X6 Scalachair X3 Voltage transformer for charging the battery in the car.



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TopChair® , the stair climbing wheelchair, creates new opportunities for people with mobility impairments : move independently at home, at work or outside.

Thanks to its tracks, this high-tech power wheelchair rides up and down stairs and obstacles on your way without any help of fixed structure like a ramp..

You can drive TopChair on your own. In most of the cases there is no need for an attendant.



TopChair® is an innovative combination of:

- 4 wheels, including two powered rear wheels, to move on flat terrain,
- 2 rubber tracks to ride across steps, curbs and obstacles.
- a high performance microprocessor for optimal security and ease of driving.

Switching from « flat mode » to « step mode » is just a press of a button.

TopChair® is the only existing wheelchair able to go up or down a 20 cm high step.

TopChair® has a range of more than to 300 steps on a single battery charge.

The embedded system controls permanently the seat and the chassis tilt. It maintains the seat horizontal automatically.