

## **King Abdul Aziz road development project: Applying Universal Design principles to support Hajj Pilgrims**

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The King Abdul Aziz Road (KAAR) Development Project will be a unique religious destination comprising hospitality, residential and commercial development to complement the position of Makkah as the centre of the Islamic world.

Some 3 million pilgrims participate in the Hajj every year and estimates suggest that around half a million are people with disabilities. A similar additional number are older people.

To ensure that the destination and all facilities are accessible, the Umm AlQura Development Company contracted with The AIModon Urban Consultancy, in partnership with the Global Alliance for Accessible Technologies and Environments (GAATES), to review the design standards and advise on accessibility and Universal Design.

The project comprises large scale pedestrian boulevards and plazas as well as a number of new public transit modes and interchanges (metro, bus rapid transit, bus and taxi) and provision for private vehicles.

The review has identified a range of improvements that would help to ensure that all pilgrims are able to move through the area with confidence and in comfort. These include recommendations on accessible routes, surface treatments, colour, tonal and texture contrast, landscaping, street furniture and toilets, illumination and lighting, wayfinding and signage.

The design recommendations are drawn both from Saudi Arabia's own Universal Accessibility Guidelines Manual and from established worldwide best practices.

Key recommendations include ensuring the "seamless" movement of people not only within the KAAR project but across all the development projects with which it will link. To achieve this there should be a single uniting scheme for all projects in the area covering wayfinding and other critical design features.

Given the high proportion of pilgrims from outside of Saudi Arabia, many of whom are non-Arabic speakers, a collection of pictograms, specifically for use in all the projects connected with access to the Holy Mosque, should be developed. It must be universally understandable and culturally acceptable.

A recognition that many pilgrims may also be unfamiliar with modern transport systems must be taken into account both in the design of features such as escalators and doors, and in the calculations of speed of movement through the systems.

It is important to recognise that a truly accessible environment will only be achieved if all components of the surrounding environment are accessible. Universal Design Guidance will help to achieve this goal.