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Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation

Easter Seals Project ACTION
ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION IN OUR NATION

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DISABILITY SERVICES

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Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation:

Transit assessment guide for students, families and educators

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This information was originally generated by ESPA staff for the Transportation YOU, DC Youth Summit 2012 as part of the Access Challenge Fieldwork activity. Participants used the checklists and introductory materials to travel a predetermined route in teams that included people with physical challenges. The DC Youth Summit was generously supported by staff from Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) and Clemson University. "Transportation YOU" is a joint initiative of the DOT and WTS to promote education in the important areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Through hands-on activities, mentoring, field experience, and a national virtual community, the program also introduces teenage girls to a wide variety of transportation careers.

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Purpose

This guide can be used as a tool to raise awareness about how people with differing abilities and preferences can use public transportation and the pedestrian environment around public transportation. The guide contains an accessibility checklist for students, families, and educators who would like to increase their understanding of transit systems and how people with disabilities use public transportation. Individual students, class groups or families will be able to take a snapshot view of accessibility features and identify areas for improvement while sampling transit trip. After using the checklist and determining the accessibility level of a particular transit trip, students, families and educators will have a greater understanding of accessible transportation. In addition, they may become more involved in community activities or committees related to local transit and disability topics!

Using the Guide

Students, families, and educators can selectively draw on the sections of this guide that are most relevant to their intended purpose. The checklists are designed to be a resource to enhance the accessibility of a transit system by evaluating individual routes/trips and fostering awareness of people's different needs and abilities.

The guide also can be used as the foundation for constructive dialogues between students, families, and educators and transit professionals, elected officials and other decision makers to improve transit services for everyone.

This guide is not intended to be a replacement for professional travel training or occupational therapy services. The Association of Travel Instruction (ATI) defines travel instruction or travel training as the professional activity of teaching individuals with disabilities and seniors how to access their environment and community and use public transportation independently. (http://www.travelinstruction.org/forms/ATIAugust2011DefinitionOfTravelTraining.pdf)

Occupational therapists help people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities. These services include comprehensive evaluations, recommendations for adaptive equipment, training, and guidance and education for family members and caregivers. (http://www.aota.org/consumers.aspx)

Transit Design

Transit trips are typically made using something other than a private vehicle or car, like the public bus, ferry, light rail, train, or sidewalks. A variety of riders of all ages and abilities may be interested in making a trip by transit; therefore, the checklists in this guide encourage students to assess all trip aspects—

including accessibility for physical, sensory, and cognitive access.

Many choices are made when designing and implementing transportation services including pedestrian pathways that connect riders to the transit system. When those choices are made based on the principles of universal design and universal design for learning, access increases for everyone.

Factors of Accessibility

In undertaking accessibility assessments related to travel and mobility, it is important to consider physical, sensory, and cognitive accessibility, as that information can help people with motor, sensory, and/or cognitive disabilities as they navigate transportation systems.

- **Physical accessibility** relates to architectural, design, and environmental characteristics that enable an individual to travel from place to place. Such design takes into consideration differing abilities to walk, stand and sit and builds access that will allow for the use of mobility aids of all types.

- **Sensory accessibility** relates to aspects of design and information sharing that enable an individual to travel independently. Such design takes into consideration that people have differing abilities to hear and see and builds in aspects to provide visual, auditory and tactile information that makes travel possible for all.

Both physical and sensory accessibility adhere to the principles of Universal Design (UD).

Universal Design is a design approach that seeks to create environments, objects, and systems that can be used by as many people as possible. To this end, Universal Design is the process of embedding **choice** for all **people** in the **things** we design.

- **Choice** involves flexibility, and multiple alternative means of use and/or interface.
- **People** includes the full range of people regardless of age, ability, sex, economic status, etc.

- **Things** include spaces, products, information systems and any other objects that humans manipulate or create (http://www.universaldesign.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=1695&Itemid=182).

- **Cognitive accessibility** relates to the ability of transportation-related directions, instructions, and signage to help individuals understand and learn, and therefore, supports mobility and access to transportation. Applied typically in education, cognitive accessibility adheres to the principles of universal design for learning (UDL).

  The term Universal Design for Learning (UDL) means a framework for guiding educational practice that:

  (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and
  (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high-achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited-English proficient (Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA).

Underlying all aspects of access to transportation by all people with disabilities are the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA contains regulations to ensure that transportation services are provided in a way that makes it accessible to and usable by people with disabilities, and provides design standards that indicate the minimum requirements necessary. The United States Access Board's ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) serve as a minimum baseline for design, construction and alteration of buildings and facilities relevant to ADA standards. Unlike UD, the ADA is a legal requirement. UD is a concept to build all places and services to meet the needs of everyone who will use them. While the ADA sets the baseline for access, UD strives for all that is possible.

To learn more about ADA standards and guidelines:
http://www.access-board.gov/ada/
U.S. Access board
Phone 800-872-2253
TTY 800-993-2822
Email ta@access-board.gov

Using this background information on ADA standards and guidelines and UD, students, families and educators can now go out into a community and assess transit facilities in light of how a person with different abilities may experience them.

Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation Checklists

Using the Checklist

The following checklists are best used by an individual or small group who is interested in evaluating the accessibility of a specific area or transit route. To use all aspects of the checklist, a trip should be planned using public transportation that includes walking to a transit stop or station, spending time at the stop or station, boarding a vehicle and staying on it long enough to assess its features and the service provided by the operator, and exiting the vehicle at a destination point. The destination point is also a stop or station that can then be assessed similar to the first one. The return trip completes the assessment for that particular trip.

Preparing for the Trip

Gather the following items:

- The Checklist for Assessing the Accessibility of Transportation and Mobility;
- A pen or pencil for making notes or a hand-held device that will capture and record data;
- A trip map and directions*;
- Enough fare to make both the outbound and return trips; and
- A camera to illustrate findings.

*Most transit systems have a customer information line or website to help plan trips on their systems. They can provide route maps and schedules, and fare information. Agencies also have professionals to help individuals and/or groups learn how to navigate their systems. The United States Local and State Transit Links on the American Public Transportation Association website will provide contact information for local transit agencies.

Also, remember to dress appropriately for the out-of-doors trip. Sensible shoes are strongly recommended!

During the Trip

During each part of the trip, follow the corresponding checklist and make notes about the accessibility features and services. Also make note of any features or services that are lacking. Detailed notes will help with later review and understanding. Illustrate the findings by taking photographs of features that need attention or are exemplary .

After the Trip

The completed assessment results can be used several ways.

1. Share your experience using this guide and traveling a transit route with classmates, family and educators.
2. Discuss your findings with the transportation provider to acknowledge the accessible features of the provider's vehicles and system and commend them for their work.
3. Use your findings to determine if the trip is one that a particular individual (perhaps yourself or a friend) would be able to make. If you are not comfortable with the level of access that exists, a different trip or a different way to make the same trip may need to be considered.

In Summary

This guide is a tool to raise awareness about how people with differing abilities and preferences use public transportation and the pedestrian environment around it, and the more accommodating of those differences and preferences transportation can be, the more riders will use it. It provides a tool for a general preliminary assessment of a transit route as an introduction to accessible transportation. More educational tools on transportation for students and people with disabilities are available on the ESPA Enhancing Youth Mobility and Transportation Options webpage.

Please send comments and share your experiences using this guide with ESPA staff by contacting us at 800-659-6428, projectaction@easterseals.com or TTY 202-347-7385.

Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation Checklists

Going to the Stop/Station

Going to the Stop/Station	**Yes/No**	**Comments**
1. Are the sidewalks free of construction and impassable barriers (e.g. trash cans, post boxes, telephone poles, signage)?		
2. Are the sidewalks flat and free of impassable cracks?		
3. Are there clear street signs posted to help travelers find their way?		
4. Are there other directional cues to support wayfinding?		
5. Are there curb cuts available, accessible, free from debris, etc.?		
6. Are there detectible warning strips (truncated domes) at the curb?		
7. Are push buttons available for walk signals and are they easy to find, reach and use?		
8. Is there adequate time to cross the street before a signal changes allowing vehicles to enter the intersection?		
9. Are there Accessible Pedestrian Signals? (a device that communicates information about pedestrian timing in nonvisual format, such as audible tones, verbal messages, and/or vibrating surfaces) http://www.accessforblind.org/aps_abt.html		

Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation Checklists

At the Stop/Station

At the Stop/Station	Yes/No	Comments
1. Is there a clear path of travel from the transit stop/station to adjacent pedestrian pathways?		
2. Is there clear access to the boarding area?		
3. Is there a flat concrete pad at the boarding area?		
4. Is adequate seating present at the stop/station?		
5. Are route numbers on the bus stop sign at least 3 inches tall?		
6. Are other signs at the stop/station easy to read?		
7. Are there braille signs indicating which buses/trains use that stop/station?		
8. Is visual information in terminals, bus stops, or stations variable: by size, contrast, color, layout, spacing, etc.		
9. Is auditory information variable: amplitude, speed, timing, cueing, etc.		
10. Is auditory information available and are alternatives provided, such as text or voice recognition-to-text technology, visual symbols for emphasis, sound alerts, etc.		

11. Where visual information is provided, is there text or spoken equivalents for that information?. Are physical objects or spatial models used?		
12. Is the environment clean/safe?		
13. Are there comfort/security features present? Trees that offer shade, benches and places to rest, bicycle racks, handrails on stairs and ramps, restrooms open and accessible, working drinking fountains, working public phones or call boxes etc.		
14. Is the lighting adequate for safe nighttime use?		
15. Is the stop or station crowded?		
16. Is the background noise and chatter distracting?		
17. Is the smell at the stop or station distracting?		

Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation Checklists

On the Vehicle

On the Vehicle	Yes/No	Comments
1. Does the vehicle have signage to indicate the route number/name and final destination?		
2. Does the operator or an automated system announce the route number/name and final destination?		
3. Is the vehicle crowded?		
4. Is the background noise and chatter on the vehicle distracting?		
5. Is the smell on the vehicle distracting?		
6. Is the lift/ramp/kneeling equipment in good working order?		
7. Is the fare box accessible?		
8. Are mobility aids secured?		
9. Are there seats designated as “priority” seating?		
10. Are stop announcements clear and audible?		
11. Do operators call out stops upon request?		

Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation Checklists

12. Do operators provide assistance as needed – using the fare box, extra time to communicate, finding a seat, etc.		
13. Is the operator calm and friendly?		
14. Is there adequate time to board and exit the vehicle?		
15. Is the operator pulling the vehicle all the way to the curb and minimizing the gap between the sidewalk and vehicle?		

Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation Checklists

Recommendations for Improving Accessibility

What improvements can be made to increase accessibility regarding going to the stop/station, waiting at the stop/station and riding the vehicle?

Accessibility features	An element of a structure or system that would enable people with different abilities to use the service or structure. For example, an entrance with a stairway that also has a ramp for people who use wheelchairs or have difficulty with steps. The ramp would be an accessibility feature.
Accessible	Capable of being reached or used.
Accessible pedestrian signals	A device that communicates information about pedestrian timing in nonvisual format, such as audible tones, verbal messages, and/or vibrating surfaces. (http://www.accessforblind.org/aps_abt.html)
ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG)	The United States Access Board's ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) serve as a minimum baseline for design, construction and alteration of buildings and facilities relevant to ADA standards. These guidelines for accessibility are to be applied during the design, construction, and alteration of building and facilities covered by Title II (public buildings and facilities) and Title III (places of public accommodation and commercial facilities) of the ADA. (http://www.access-board.gov/ada/)
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	This is the abbreviation for the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, also known as Public Law 101-336, that is codified at 42 UC Sections 12101 et seq. This civil rights legislation prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, state and local government, transportation, and telecommunications.
Amplitude	The varying intensity of sounds –sounds that vary getting louder or softer may be distracting to some riders, especially for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The variation could interfere with comprehension.
Assessment	The act of determining the value, importance or size of something.
Association of Travel Instruction (ATI)	An incorporated non-profit professional association of travel training instructors and travel trainers.
Auditory information	Related to or experienced through hearing.
Boarding area	A defined space to be used for embarking or disembarking from a vehicle.
Braille	A system of writing for people who are blind that uses characters made up of raised dots.
Clear path of travel	A travel space that is free of obstructions that could hinder wheelchair users, blind patrons, or others with disabilities. In general, this means a route at least 36 inches wide and free of chairs, tables, displays or other obstructions.
Cueing	To give a reminder of or hint about something.

Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation Glossary

Curb cuts	A short ramp cutting through a curb or built up to it.
Detectible warning strips (truncated domes)	A standardized surface feature built in or applied to walking surfaces or other elements to warn of hazards on a circulation path.
Disability	The decline in or absence (as a result of impairment) of the possibility of a normal activity for a person, both with respect to the methods and range of implementation.
Final destination	The place that you arrive at the end of a trip.
Mobility	The act of moving or the ability to move from one's present position to one's desired position.
Mobility aids	Electronic and manual devices like wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, or canes that are used to increase a person's locomotion.
Occupational therapy	The therapeutic use of occupations, including everyday life activities with individuals, groups, populations, or organizations to support participation, performance, and function in roles and situations in home, school, workplace, community, and other settings. (http://www.aota.org/Practitioners/Advocacy/State/Resources/PracticeAct/36437.aspx)
Operator	The person responsible for driving the bus, train or other type of vehicle.
Pedestrian	A person traveling by their own locomotion outside a vehicle (e.g., someone walking or using a wheelchair on a sidewalk).
Pedestrian pathways	A path people can use to travel from one place to another without a vehicle.
Priority seating	Designated seats, usually in the front of a vehicle, reserved for people with disabilities.
Route number/name	The name, usually a number, associated with a set pathway that a public transit vehicle follows on a timetable (e.g., the 980 bus always travels up and down main street from First Avenue to 40th Avenue).
Stop announcement	Announcement made by a person or by a recorded message which informs passengers on a bus, trolley, commuter rail, or rapid rail of the locations where the vehicle stops along a fixed route. Public and private entities providing fixed route service must announce stops at transfer points with other fixed routes, major intersections and destination points, and intervals along a route sufficient to permit individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities to be oriented to their location and any stop on request of an individual with a disability.
Transit	Transportation by car, bus, rail, or ferry that is publicly or privately owned which provides service to the general public, including special services, on a regular or scheduled basis.

Building Awareness in Accessible Transportation Glossary

Travel training	One-to-one instruction provided to people with disabilities other than blindness or visual impairments the purpose for which is to enable safe and independent travel in unprotected environments, including on public transit.
Universal design	A design approach that seeks to create environments, objects, and systems that can be used by as many people as possible. To this end, Universal Design is the process of embedding choice for all people in the things we design.
Universal design for learning	A framework for guiding educational practice that: (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient (Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA).
Wayfinding	Wayfinding is the process that people use to navigate within their communities as they move from place to place. Wayfinding cues include: signs and maps; marked pathways; landmarks such as sculptures, fountains, distinctive buildings, gardens, benches and rest areas; and lighting.