

2021 Trends Report



Photo: ButterFLi, Los Angeles, California

nadtc

The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC)

NADTC is a national program funded by the Federal Transit Administration and administered by Easterseals Inc. and USAging, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living.

Our Mission:

To promote the availability and accessibility of transportation options that meet the needs of older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers.

The mission of NADTC is to:

- **Serve** professionals in the fields of transportation, aging, disability, human services and caregiving.
- **Provide** resources and training through an information and referral hotline, website, as well as both distance and online training.
- **Empower** communities across the country to implement or improve innovative transportation programs at the local level.
- **Support** older adults, people with disabilities of all ages, and their families to help them find the best mobility options in their communities to reach their destination of choice.

For more information about NADTC and the services we provide, please visit www.nadtc.org/

Contact Us:

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center

Washington, D.C. 20003

Toll-Free Hotline: (866) 983-3222

TTY: (202) 347-7385

Email: contact@nadtc.org

Website: www.nadtc.org/

Follow us:

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [YouTube](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

Travel Training During a Global Pandemic

Background

Across the country, transportation agencies are approaching services in unique ways; one of these methods of delivery is Travel Training. This service is often developed by a Mobility Manager or agency staff and used as an educational tool to assist passengers individually or in a group setting. This type of service is an eligible expense under FTA Section 5310, and can support staff time, marketing efforts, bus fare or whatever the program might need to assist in training passengers. The primary focus of Travel Training is to implement a training program or curriculum to assist riders, including older adults and persons with disabilities, with the end goal of giving them the tools to travel independently within their community.

A Transit Cooperative Research Program publication (TCRP, Report 168), [Travel Training for Older Adults](#), indicated that the main reason for not riding the bus was an unfamiliarity with public transportation or available options, and a general lack of confidence in using its services. Navigating transportation can be intimidating to new customers, especially for the aging and disability communities. Riders may have trouble understanding and navigating system route maps and schedules and may be overwhelmed by transit options. This is where adopting a formal Travel Training program can be beneficial for your riders.



There are several opportunities to assist transit staff in the implementation of a Travel Training program; one of the primary options is the [Certified Travel Training Instructor](#) program managed by Easterseals

Project Action Consulting. This is a 60-credit hour course, to be completed within 2 years, and certified through the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) at the University of South Florida. As a way to continue learning and gain additional resources, Travel Trainers can become members of the [Association of Travel Instruction](#) (ATI). Membership also facilitates connection with peers in travel training programs across the country and helps travel trainers further develop their skills.

Travel Training during COVID has presented many challenges and has proven that even during a global pandemic, people still need to get to work or access critical medical appointments. Many travel training programs shut down or limited their services due to local health measures and an inability to appropriately keep riders healthy and safe. However, several transit agencies were able to develop methods to deliver the training needed.

What is Travel Training?

Travel Trainers demonstrate the skills needed for people with disabilities, older adults, and other interested travelers to access and use public transportation independently. By becoming a certified travel instructor, you can ensure partner agencies that you can confidently assist individuals learn the skills needed to ride the bus, access transportation options and navigate the community in both rural and urban settings. Professional skills developed through formalized Travel Training coursework include:

- Knowledge of human development and social behavior
- An understanding of community transportation services and options
- Developing individualized trip planning tools
- Identifying concepts of both natural and built environments along paths of travel

Trip Planning

Scheduling a trip applies to rural Demand Response and Complementary Paratransit services in urban areas. Guidelines vary by system, but typically require calling at least 24 hours in advance of the trip, and many also allow customers to schedule multiple trips or standing reservations months in advance. When scheduling a trip, transit agencies will ask for the home address, phone number and the destination to which the passenger will be traveling for work, school, social or medical purposes. Giving information to transit agencies is safe and secure and is only used by agencies to learn about passengers' travel preferences, use of a wheelchair or walker, notifying the driver of a service animal, or traveling with a personal care attendant or companion.

Travel Training instructs riders how to schedule a ride; catch the bus; when to be ready for a scheduled pick-up; what to expect while riding the bus; finding the correct bus stop; a timeframe for the bus to arrive (Demand Response); how to pay for the trip; what to expect when using the bus lift or having a wheelchair secured; and how to call for a return trip home.

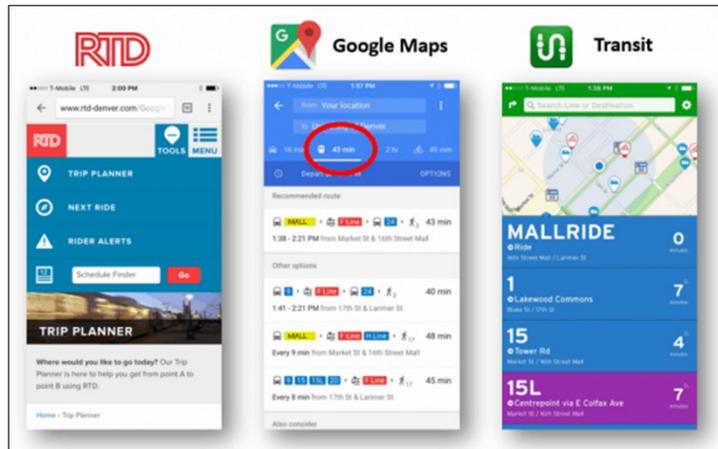


Photo: Examples of Trip Planning Mobile Applications

Trip planning on an urban fixed route system can look rather different than on Demand Response. Riders need to be aware of the route number, closest fixed route stop, and how to navigate to their desired end destination. There are many tools available for the rider, including mobile applications or online planning tools to discover appropriate routes and run through scenarios for the trip. If technology is a barrier, the Travel Trainer can meet with

the rider to work through each step of the process – reading a route map, locating the nearest bus stop, how to pay the fare, and how to notify the driver when you have reached your desired stop.

Path of Travel

After the trainer has collected information about where the rider is going and for what purpose, they will perform a walking audit, assess the path of travel, and tailor a trip for individual riders. A Travel Trainer has the ability to assess the built environment and sidewalk infrastructure along the path of travel before meeting with the rider. Trainers are looking for obstructions or barriers along the path of travel; low hanging tree branches or shrubs that encroach across the sidewalk; cracks and bumps in the sidewalk or street; clearly marked and safe crosswalks; curb cuts; traffic signals; and landmarks to assist in a seamless and stress-free trip.

Local Examples

Travel Training has the ability to be as simple as providing transportation resources and information through a call center or presenting to community groups. Travel Training programs can also be an extensive team of trainers providing hands-on education, including path of travel and route planning assessments.

The Kennedy Center, Inc., Trumbull, Connecticut

Funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, [The Kennedy Center](#) teaches people with disabilities and older adults to use the local bus and rail system properly and safely on a one-to-one basis. The Travel Training program addresses safe street crossing, how to interact with bus drivers and other passengers, and self-advocacy for traveling independently. Since 1991, The Kennedy Center has successfully trained more than 3,000 people with cognitive, sensory, and physical disabilities within their service area.

Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART), Des Moines, Iowa

DART is the designated transit agency serving the Des Moines urbanized area, offering fixed route, Complementary Paratransit, Demand Response, vanpool and a newly developed microtransit option. They have access to a full-time team of marketing and planning staff, giving the Mobility Coordinator the ability to promote and educate the public on the services offered. Prior to the pandemic, DART's Mobility Coordinator was regularly out in the community promoting the use of transportation and conducting Travel Training for individuals and groups seeking information about DARTS's available services. Trainings typically consisted of meeting with a group at an agency or conducting Travel Trainings by meeting at an established stop and providing a quick orientation and bus ride to their desired destination.



Photo: Des Moines DART

However, in March of 2020, regular bus service was reduced to essential trips only. This eliminated face-to-face trainings, which focused DART's outreach and Travel Training programs to phone call check-ins with existing clients. After a few months, DART staff started preparing ways to approach virtual trainings, as well as incorporating many of the changes implemented due to the pandemic; social distancing, federal mask mandates, rear boarding, and providing fare-free service. A large majority of DART's Travel Training clients are refugees or individuals new to the community, so the local resettlement agency has formed a partnership with DART to provide free training within the first few weeks of arriving to the Des Moines metro area. Considering many of the riders needed to get to work, even during the pandemic, the initial plan was to

conduct live virtual trainings focused on basic orientation to DART services. However, it was quickly realized that many of the trainees did not have immediate access to a computer or internet, which was previously accessed through a community center or group home setting and now, due to the pandemic, were closed to public use.

DART's Mobility Coordinator quickly started working with its External Affairs Department to develop a series of short videos that could be available on its YouTube channel. The videos would be short clips of how to board, how to pay, where to sit, and how to notify the driver when the passenger was ready to get off. Access to the internet remained a barrier, however, the videos were accessible wherever the rider could access the internet, and available 24/7. When training riders who use English as a second language, an interpreter is needed to ensure a better understanding of the skills being taught. During the pandemic, DART started using video chat with an interpreter while training new riders, and when returning to in-person trainings, they maintained that relationship with the same interpreters, allowing DART to adapt its new ways of conducting trainings, post-pandemic, and avoiding large groups of trainees. Another program shift occurred when nursing, long term care and residential facilities closed their doors to outside visitors, and DART was able to utilize its training videos for a broader audience. One such care facility has several sites around the Des Moines



Photo: Des Moines DART

metro area and recognized that residents could use their quarantine time to educate themselves on public transportation, so they made DART's videos readily available for anyone to watch. The videos proved to be popular with residents, and once they were allowed to navigate away from the facility, they were eager to try out their newly developed skills by riding the bus to their favorite destinations and getting back into the community.

Ridership from these facilities continued to grow in early 2021; so much so, that the company added transportation as a benefit to the residents and became an Unlimited Access Partner with DART. This partnership allows the company to pay for transportation costs, and then pass along free bus passes to their residents. This type of partnership is typically geared towards businesses for its employees, but this is a unique example of a care facility offering transportation as a benefit to its residents.

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), Bellingham, Washington

Just before the pandemic, WTA's Travel Trainer was tasked with building a program that would be open to people of all ages and abilities, geared toward anyone who wanted to learn how to ride the fixed route bus independently. This program assists with online trip planning; how to read and understand route maps and schedules; identifying bus stops and landmarks; purchasing bus fares; and safely transferring between bus routes. The ultimate



Photo: Whatcom Transportation Authority

goal is to transfer Complementary Paratransit users to the fixed route system: for those who have conditional eligibility; for people whose rides vary by season due to extreme hot or cold weather; for individuals with a short-term injury enabling the passenger to navigate the fixed route safely; or for passengers who may be ambulatory but need an extra boost of confidence to ride independently. Prior to COVID, the Travel Trainer had successfully transitioned 86 individual paratransit riders onto fixed route services, and at \$45 per ride, this created an estimated \$3,870 monthly savings for WTA.

At the onset of COVID, WTA's Travel Trainer was left with no trainees nor had the ability to provide community outreach, due to closed businesses and restricted community guidelines, thankfully, WTA was able to retain their Travel Trainer and put them to work on other tasks. It provided an opportunity for the trainer to take [Certified Travel Training Instructor](#) coursework to better understand the community and its passengers. As part of the ongoing community

effort, the Travel Trainer also assisted with meal delivery from the local food banks, getting vital commodities to those who could not leave their homes and were sheltering in place.

Another big project, as part of their grant with Washington State DOT, was to inventory every WTA bus stop and assess the ADA accessibility and compliance with local and federal regulations. This project has allowed both the Travel Trainer and WTA to understand future project work, and the accessibility of their stops for passengers to navigate safely around the community.

Summary

Travel Training Instruction can be a method to enhance the knowledge and skills of older adults, persons with disabilities, and the public, allowing riders to travel safely and independently throughout their community. Programs developed by the Mobility Manager or Travel Trainer are eligible under the FTA Section 5310 program, as a way to enhance services for the aging and disability communities but remain open to general riders, too. Public transportation can be challenging for those who have not ridden a bus in their lifetime, often relying on friends or family for a ride to their vital medical appointments, essential trips, grocery shopping or social outings. Travel Training can enhance a rider's confidence in riding on their own and broadening their ability to independently access the services they need.

Resources

"Travel Training for Older Adults." Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP, Report 168)

<https://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/171323.aspx>

Easterseals Project Action Consulting; Travel Trainer Certification

<https://www.projectaction.com/certification-programs/travel-trainer-certification/>

Association for Travel Instruction

<https://www.travelinstruction.org>

The Kennedy Center

<https://www.thekennedycenterinc.org>

Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART)

<https://www.ridedart.com/>

Whatcom Transportation Authority; Travel Training

<https://www.ridewta.com/getting-around/accessibility/travel-training>



nadtc
NATIONAL AGING AND DISABILITY
TRANSPORTATION CENTER

USAging

easterseals

