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# Accessible Pathways & Livable Communities

**POCKET GUIDE**

Accessible pathways help form the foundation of an accessible transportation system and a livable community. This pocket guide contains concepts for communities to consider when improving transportation facilities, sidewalks, and routes to transit.

Livability improvements can enhance ease of use for all modes of transportation thus encouraging community interaction, promoting economic viability, and ultimately adding value to neighborhoods.

For Easter Seals Project ACTION, the definition of *pathway* goes beyond a physical path to include the entire route of travel that transit passengers navigate to reach their destination.



## Pathway accessibility:

- promotes individual mobility and scheduling flexibility,
- reduces or eliminates dependence on paratransit service, and
- creates mobility for all who use transportation services, such as passengers pushing strollers and travelers with luggage.

## Community Action Steps for Improving Accessibility

Building accessible pathways is a starting point in the process of supporting livable communities. The following are steps you can take to encourage accessible transportation and the involvement of people with disabilities in community development.

### Include People with Disabilities in the Planning Process

Involving people with disabilities in local transportation planning can help increase the efficiency of transportation resources in a community. People with disabilities who participate in local planning can:

- describe gaps in service related to destinations, frequency of service, routings, and travel time;
- describe environmental barriers that exist, such as poor bus stop placement and lack of sidewalks;
- help prioritize improvements to accessibility needed in the community; and
- provide feedback on pathway alterations to ensure that ADA requirements are met during all construction phases of a transportation project.

## Incorporate Accessible Features into Transportation Facility Design

Local transportation and public works agencies are typically responsible for incorporating accessible design into improvement projects. Considerations for creating an accessible route of travel or accessible transit facility include:

- fostering public-private partnerships for transit-oriented development in urban and suburban areas,
- offering wider fare gates at transit facilities that improve access for wheelchair and mobility-device users,
- installing an additional elevator in transit stations to accommodate more riders and to serve as an alternate during repairs,
- incorporating technology as appropriate to improve accessibility and safety,
- including pedestrian traffic signals with both visual and audible signals, and
- making sure signals indicating time for forward movement are safe and hold long enough so that people who cannot move fast can cross the street.

*Accessible pathways* are corridors of travel in the public right-of-way and on private property that incorporate such elements as sidewalks, curb ramps, cross walks, way-finding signage, and pedestrian signals at intersections.

**Accessible pathways support livable communities.**

**Easter Seals Project ACTION** partners with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, and other organizations, including the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center and the National Complete Streets Coalition, to promote livable communities training events and initiatives. To find out more about the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities and to connect to partner organizations, visit the ESPA Livability webpage at [www.projectaction.org](http://www.projectaction.org)



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**Easter Seals Project ACTION** supports livable communities by offering training, technical assistance, results of applied research, and news while joining efforts with other agencies and organizations on ways to make the paths to public transportation more accessible.



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## Improve Bus Stop and Transit System Accessibility

Whether a community enhances the accessibility of one transit stop or develops a plan to achieve community-wide accessibility, all riders will benefit from improvements. Recommendations for creating accessible stops include:

- conducting a bus stop inventory using an assessment checklist,
- incorporating barrier-free design, wayfinding mechanisms in urban areas, and safety and warning elements,
- designing stops using Americans with Disabilities Act standards and considering incorporating universal design to create a usable environment for everyone,
- adding comfort amenities, such as benches, trash receptacles, and bicycle storage for ease of rider use, and
- adding features that protect riders against heat, cold and wind.



Image source: [www.pedbikeimages.org](http://www.pedbikeimages.org) / Jan Moser 2009

## Promote Rural Livability

Livability applies to rural communities as well as urban areas. According to the U.S. Census and the Rural Assistance Center, rural residents make up approximately 27% of the United States population, and approximately 11 million people with disabilities live in rural areas. Rural transportation providers often apply creative and innovative strategies to offer service in areas where traditional roadside transit stops are great distances apart or may not exist.

Rural service strategies that promote livability include:

- creating accessible rural bus stops by installing a concrete or asphalt pad on the shoulder of the road with a curb cut that meets ADA guidelines, and
- encouraging community connections through volunteer driver programs. Friends, neighbors, and co-workers can provide reimbursable, individualized transportation by participating through a volunteer system.

Other strategies include:

- coordinating transit services, which encourages agencies and providers to share vehicles or collaborate to combine funding sources to offer more options, and
- establishing flexible routes that allow drivers to pick up the general public at designated stops as they pick up other clients for door-to-door service.

## Benefits of Accessible Communities

The benefits of building accessible pathways and improving connectivity to transit can be measured by the social, health and economic value that access to transportation brings to individuals and the communities in which they live.

Accessible, livable communities:

- assist the 36 million people\* with disabilities in the U.S. who are living in non-institutionalized environments with transportation options that enable independent living,
- support youth with disabilities with career and college transition,
- improve social equity by narrowing the employment gap between people with disabilities (39% employed) and those without (80% employed)\*,
- provide safe mobility for seniors who acquire changes in functional abilities,
- decrease the cost of long-term care by facilitating community-living,
- help families, individuals and caregivers maintain healthy lives, thereby potentially reducing healthcare costs,
- boost economic and social vitality by creating jobs, protecting the environment and enhancing community engagement, and
- reduce traffic and pedestrian fatalities.

\* U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

## ESPA Accessible Pathways Resources

The following resources related to building accessible paths to transit are available free of charge through ESPA and serve as starting points for communities that want to implement ideas described in this pocket guide.

- ◆ [Accessible Pathways to Bus Stops and Transit: A Process Guide](#)
- ◆ [Accessible Pedestrian Signals: Making Your Community Safer and More Accessible for Everyone](#)
- ◆ [Accessible Transportation in Rural Areas: An Easter Seals Project ACTION Resource Sheet](#)
- ◆ [Expanding Mobility Options for People with Disabilities: A Practitioner's Guide to Community-Based Transportation Planning](#)
- ◆ [Including People with Disabilities in Coordinated Transportation Plans](#)
- ◆ [Toolkit for the Assessment of Bus Stop Accessibility and Safety](#)
- ◆ [Universal Design and Accessible Transit Systems: Facts to Consider when Updating or Expanding Your Transit System](#)

**Browse ESPA products at [www.projectaction.org](http://www.projectaction.org) and order online.** For assistance, call (800) 659-6428 or email [projectaction@easterseals.com](mailto:projectaction@easterseals.com)

All transit riders benefit from an **accessible** path to a bus stop.