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ACCESSIBLE PATHWAYS TO BUS STOPS AND TRANSIT FACILITIES: A PROCESS GUIDE

FINDINGS IN BRIEF

JUNE 2009

The Accessible Pathways process guide is designed to help local governments, transit agencies, and community advocates reach their goal of making public transportation more accessible for all users through improvement or creation of pathways to transit. With a focus on Universal Design, the process guide identifies common problems related to transit accessibility, explains solutions that several communities are using to improve accessibility, and identifies steps that local leaders can follow to identify both problems and solutions so that they may achieve the goal of greater community accessibility.

Accessible Pathways and Access to Transit

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

Travelers with disabilities and those using mobility devices need pathway infrastructure that allows them the freedom to use different modes, including fixed-route bus transit, light rail, commuter rail, and subway. Pathway accessibility promotes individual mobility and scheduling flexibility. In addition, accessibility can reduce or eliminate dependence on paratransit service. Finally, accessibility creates mobility for all who use transportation services in public space, such as passengers pushing strollers, carrying luggage and using parking meters.

Accessibility Stakeholders: Local Government, Transit Agencies, and Community Stakeholders

The process guide has three main audiences: local government, transit agencies, and community members or advocates. It includes background information so that people with varying levels of knowledge will find the process guide useful.

In any community, several major players and stakeholders are necessary to create accessible pathways. Major stakeholders include public transit agencies; local transportation providers, planning, and public works agencies; and disability advocacy and community organizations. Other stakeholders include metropolitan planning organizations, state departments of transportation, the residential and commercial development community, health, education, and recreation advocacy groups, and local businesses.

Definition of an accessible pathway

"…continuous corridor of accessible travel, threading its way along sidewalks and across driveways and roadways, free of abrupt changes in travel…assure access for all sidewalk travelers, from those who use wheelchairs to those who push strollers to those who find their way with a cane."

Public Rights-of-Way Access Advisory Committee Report (Part 1)

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Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation

Steps to Improving Community Accessibility

A step-by-step process can be used for improving accessibility policies and individual projects. Early in the process, stakeholders and their respective roles should be identified. Transit systems and public works agencies may have different perspectives on how to develop physical infrastructure based on their service priorities. Sidewalks, shelters, and pedestrian access are often the responsibility of non-transit agencies, so it's important for stakeholders to collaborate on decisions regarding parking, curb cuts, street furniture, and trash cans or recycling bins that affect access to transit.

The steps to improving community accessibility are:

1. Identifying Goals

In the first step, stakeholders compile existing goals and policies related to accessible pathways. Goals may be created if none currently exist. Examples of identified goals include "ensuring an accessible sidewalk network" , "increasing funding for accessible infrastructure", and "changing design guidelines for curb ramps". This step also includes identifying a list of organizations or entities involved.

2. Conducting a Community Report Card

A community report card provides space to go through an *Ingredients of Success* evaluation. The seven ingredients include:

- A tipping point: a person or event that has prompted local interest or focus on accessible pathways.

- Collaboration among stakeholders: the way in which agencies or organizations collaborate, what the collaboration achieves, and if there are missed opportunities for collaboration.

- Objectives and standards: specific goals or objectives that are listed in existing plans (such as master plans or transit plans), and how those objectives are implemented.

- Evidence of policy translated into practice: identification of policies that support access and have or have not resulted in action.

- Evidence of budget commitment: proof within agency capital or operating budgets that ADA compliance and accessibility projects are receiving funding.

- Regular feedback: establishment of mechanisms for proactive or reactive feedback from the community including identification of missed opportunities for feedback.

- Learning from other communities or commitment to learning: evidence of training, skill building, traveling to other communities to see case studies or learning from other professionals.

3. Preparing an Action Plan

The third step in the process is preparing an action plan. This step includes the following elements:

- Completing a gap analysis to review the current state of an organization or community and the desired future state of that same organization.

- Identifying issues and outcomes, setting standards, identifying roles, and collaboration expectations.

- Conducting a return on investment analysis and creating a funding and resources plan.

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- Thinking about time lines, phasing of the plan, and evaluating outcomes.

4. Ensuring Follow-up

The last step in the process is designed to encourage implementation of the plan by:

- Linking commitments made during the planning process with implementation tasks.

- Connecting recommended activities and improvements to local government and transit agency work plans.

- Providing a record of outcomes achieved and accessibility conditions that have changed.

Accessible Pathways Planning

Stakeholders involved in the local accessible pathways planning process should be aware of current access guidelines. The Process Guide includes a brief overview of access guidelines and the federal agencies that determine guidelines.

When it comes to accessibility planning and policy, local government, transit agencies, and community advocates have individual, yet collaborative roles. Examples of the roles include:

Local Government - Ensure that the transportation master plan is up to date; ensure that staff members are current on local codes pertaining to the ADA; incorporate universal/accessible design standards; and ensure goals for performance standards and funding are the same as the transit agency.

Transit Agency - Incorporate goals in agency documents; work with local government to identify an appropriate role for each agency; and ensure goals and performance standards are the same as local government.

Community Advocates - Become educated on how accessibility needs translate into project scope and design standards; establish working relationship with local government or the transit agency to share information on transit access needs; and document locations that are inaccessible.

Stakeholders are recommended to take similar roles regarding project scoping and plan review, in the integration of paratransit and fixed-route services, and physical infrastructure design of driveways, detectable warnings, pedestrian refuges, and sidewalks and ramps.

Local government and transit agencies should also consider collaborating on maintaining temporary pathways during construction and seasonal sidewalk needs. Community outreach and education is another important function that may incorporate opportunities for public feedback and travel training .

Process Guide Resources

The Accessible Pathways Process Guide includes several resources beyond the step-by-step process for accessible pathways planning. Resources include a Lessons from Case Studies section that provides real-life examples of projects that have occurred and what was learned. Examples of planning coordination and the process used to develop accessible design projects are provided for 12 cities in various regions of the United States.

There is an ADA Design Resources section (Appendix A) that contains a list of resources that a reader can use to seek out additional design guidelines or more background information.

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The Literature Review (Appendix C) is a compilation of some of the existing literature written on the subject of accessibility and transit.

These resources and the steps needed to identify accessibility solutions are available in the complete report *Accessible Pathways to Bus Stops and Transit Facilities: A Process Guide.* The guide is available through the Easter Seals Project ACTION Web site Store. Copies of the report and this Findings in Brief may be downloaded at www.projectaction.org.

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