



Improving Pathways to Transit for Persons with Disabilities

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Enabling full access to different modes of public transportation provides persons with disabilities a greater degree of freedom, mobility, and independence in their daily lives, and allows them to access life-sustaining and life-enhancing services. Making transit vehicles, stations, and stops ADA-accessible, however, are not the only steps needed to achieve full access and the mobility afforded by that access. For persons with disabilities, the infrastructure that surrounds stations and stops and the pathways that lead to these transit facilities must also be sufficient to create unobstructed access to transit services. To explore ways to address this need, the research team examined strategies employed by transit agencies and their partners when making improvements in the built environment that permit persons with disabilities fuller access to public transportation. We also sought to understand the challenges faced when attempting to make these improvements in places that lie beyond agency property.

Study Methods

The research team used a case-study approach to identify and explore successful efforts to improve pathways to transit. We conducted a brief national survey of agencies actively working toward the goal of improving pathways to transit and used responses to identify potential locations for further investigation. We selected five agencies operating in diverse locations for further study and conducted in-person interviews and site visits to learn more about the strategies used by the agencies and their partners to make improvements to the built environment that allow persons with disabilities to access and use public transportation. The agencies profiled are Memphis Area Transit Authority (MATA), Memphis, Tennessee; Broward County Transit (BCT), Florida; Link Transit, Wenatchee, Washington; TriMet, Portland, Oregon; and NJ TRANSIT, Newark and New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Findings

The agencies profiled employ many strategies to improve accessibility and to extend access into communities in which they operate. We discuss seventeen projects and programs undertaken by the agencies, each of which advances pathway improvements. Broadly, each of these efforts can be categorized by its area of impact or the lever by which change is enacted – through the use of evaluation and planning practices, physical improvements to station or stop areas, adoption and implementation of Complete Street policies, and by the enhancement of passenger capacity through initiatives like passenger travel training.

While ADA accessibility of transit stations and stops is critical and being implemented throughout the U.S., only when the infrastructure and the pathways surrounding these services are also made accessible can full access be achieved.



SW Oak & 17th – Before (Left) and After (Right) for Line 57-TV Highway Improvement, TriMet, Portland, Oregon

Policy Recommendations

The authors recommend that people with disabilities are best served when agencies employ a multi-pronged approach toward making improvements to the pathways to transit that allows them to:

- **understand the needs** of their consumers with disabilities through direct outreach to consumers, evaluation of routes and ongoing data collection efforts to monitor progress,
- **pursue partnerships** with advocacy groups, metropolitan planning organizations and local governments to promote connectivity between land use and transit and to allow for sharing of costs,
- **communicate** their plans to promote information sharing,
- **approach cost and funding issues creatively** by exploring less expensive means to meet goals and pooling resources,
- **think holistically about projects** to more closely align transportation services with consumer needs, and
- **incorporate new technologies** while taking into consideration long-term costs, reuse of materials and the use of green materials.

Ultimately agencies should understand that improving the pathways to transit enhance travel for all users. The true measure of success is a seamless trip from origin to destination.

About the Authors

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1233.html

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