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TRANSITION SUMMARY

Travel Training for Youth with Disabilities

Transportation provides us all with access to the wider opportunities of society — employment, postsecondary education, job training programs, recreation. Travelling by car, by cab, or by public transportation systems such as bus and subway enables us to go to work and come home, go to school or other training programs, visit friends, take care of daily needs such as grocery shopping, and enjoy recreational activities.

Yet, many individuals with disabilities have traditionally been isolated from these societal opportunities, because they lacked a means of transportation. For many, driving a car was not possible, due to a visual, physical, or cognitive disability. Public transportation systems were often inaccessible due to structural barriers. Still other individuals were unable to use the transportation systems that were available, because they lacked the training, or "know-how," to use these systems safely.

Today, the lack of access to transportation that many individuals with disabilities have experienced is changing. Recently enacted federal legislation clearly intends to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate independently and successfully in society. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) recognizes the critical role that public transportation plays in the lives of many people and mandates that public transportation systems become accessible to people with disabilities. It also mandates that paratransit services are available and accessible to individuals who are unable to use public transportation.

Unfortunately, availability of transportation is not the only impediment to independent travel for people with disabilities. They must also know *what* systems of transport are available, how to access these, how to plan their travel, and how to execute their travel plans safely. For many individuals, learning how to travel on public transportation requires systematic training. Travel training, then,

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is often a crucial element in empowering people with disabilities to use the newly accessible transportation systems in our country.

To this end, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) can be of particular importance. The IDEA requires public schools to provide what are known as "transition services" to youth with disabilities, to prepare them for the transition from school to adult life. While accessible transportation and transportation training are not specifically mentioned within IDEA, clearly the ability to use available transportation systems may be critical to a student's successful transition into the adult world. Thus, both the ADA and the IDEA provide individuals with disabilities, their families, school systems, service providers, community agencies, and transit systems with compelling incentives to work together to ensure that individuals with disabilities learn how to use accessible transportation.

This *Transition Summary* focuses upon just that — training people with disabilities to use public transportation safely and independently. This Transition Summary was written for people who live in communities which have some form of public transportation. The following articles describe the essential components of a successful travel training program, the specific skills that travelers need to have in place to assure safe and independent travel, and the issues that arise with specific disabilities such as physical, cognitive, and visual impairments. An overview of the ADA, as it relates to transportation, is also provided. This *Transition Summary* concludes with a listing of resources of further information including resources for people living in small and/or rural communities.

An Introduction to Travel Training

by

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What is travel training?

Travel training is short-term, comprehensive, intensive instruction designed to teach students with disabilities how to travel safely and independently on public transportation. The goal of travel training is to train students to travel independently to a regularly visited destination and back. Specially trained personnel provide the travel training on a one-to-one basis. Students learn travel skills while following a particular route, generally to school or a worksite, and are taught the safest, most direct route. The travel trainer is responsible for making sure the student experiences and understands the realities of public transportation and learns the skills required for safe and independent travel.

The term "travel training" is often used generically to refer to a program that provides instruction in travel skills to individuals with any disability except visual impairment. Individuals who have a visual impairment receive travel training from orientation and mobility specialists. *(Orientation and mobility training is discussed in the article by Elga Joffee on page 15.)* Travel trainers have the task of understanding how different disabilities affect a person's ability to travel independently, and devising customized strategies to teach travel skills that address the specific needs of people with those disabilities.

What federal legislation supports the provision of travel training?

Interest in travel training has increased in the 1990s. Recently enacted federal legislation clearly intends to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate independently and successfully in society. Of significance are the 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the 1990 passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which reauthorized and amended Public Law 94-142.

The ADA recognizes the critical role that public transportation plays in the lives of many people and mandates that public transit systems become accessible to people who have disabilities and that paratransit services are available and accessible to individuals who are unable to use public transportation. In recognition of the ADA, architectural barriers are being removed, new transit vehicles are being purchased, equipment is being modified, paratransit certification and eligibility practices are being established, and transit personnel are being trained to provide

Courtesy of the NYC Board of Education Travel Training Program

service to people who have disabilities. Nationwide, the transit industry is expecting to serve increasing numbers of individuals who have disabilities. *(For more information on the ADA, see the article by Rosalyn Simon on page 18.)*

The IDEA requires public schools to provide transition services to students with disabilities, to prepare them for the transition from school to post-school life. *Transition services* are a coordinated set of activities intended to prepare young people with disabilities to participate in the everyday life of their community. These services include instruction in employment and life skills and identifying adult living objectives. For many students transportation is critical to transition, since transportation affects how people live, work, play, and participate in their community. Parents and professionals need to advocate for the inclusion of travel training in the Indivudualized Education Program (IEP). Access to transportation, and the ability to use it, can open doors and provide a means to many otherwise unavailble opportunities to persons with disabilities.

Together, the ADA and the IDEA provide individuals with disabilities, their families, school systems, service providers, community agencies, and transit systems with compelling incentives to work together to ensure that students learn how to use accessible transportation.

Providing students with travel training can reduce expenses for school districts, local governments, transit providers, agencies, or any organization that provides transportation. The cost of using public transportation is significantly less than the cost of using a contracted private car or private bus service. While the cost of training a student can be substantial, in the long run that cost is a worthwhile investment, since the student will gain independence and henceforth will assume responsibility for the cost of using public transportation.

What skills are required for traveling independently?

Experienced travel trainers agree that simply teaching students to follow a route is not enough to ensure safe travel. A quality travel training program will require students to demonstrate certain skills before travel training in real life situations begins and will require students to practice certain skills with 100% consistency before they can be recommended for independent travel.

Before being allowed to enter travel training, students should possess three general skills. These are:

1. An awareness of personal space, meaning a clear idea of where their personal space ends and that of others begins.
2. An awareness of their environment.
3. The ability to recognize and respond to danger.

The article, *"A Model of a Travel Training Program — The New York City Board of Education Travel Training Program" (see page 10)*, provides more detail on these skills.

Before being allowed to travel independently, students should demonstrate a number of other skills. Specifically, they should be able to:

- ✓ cross streets safely, with and without traffic signals
- ✓ board the correct bus or subway
- ✓ recognize and disembark at the correct destination
- ✓ make decisions
- ✓ initiate actions
- ✓ recognize the need for assistance and request help from an appropriate source
- ✓ follow directions
- ✓ recognize and avoid dangerous situations and obstacles
- ✓ maintain appropriate behavior
- ✓ handle unexpected situations, such as re-routed buses or sub ways, or getting lost
- ✓ deal appropriately with strangers.

Before graduating from a travel training program, students must demonstrate mastery of these skills and employ them with 100% consistency. Although students find it useful to be able to read, tell time, and calculate simple math, these skills are not mandatory for independent travel or for travel training, and no individual should be denied training if she or he lacks these skills. A good travel training program accounts for a student's disabilities while making full use of a student's abilities.

When should young people with disabilities enter a travel training program?

Most people enter travel training between the ages of 15 and 21. However, it may be appropriate for some children to be introduced to travel training at an earlier age.

How is a student selected for travel training?

A student can request training for herself or himself or be referred to travel training by his or her family or by school personnel or anyone closely involved in the daily life of the student. It is important to note that travel training may need to be included as a crucial component of a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the education and transition plan drawn up by the student and his or her teachers and family.

The candidate for travel training then goes through an assessment process. A travel training professional gathers information about the student's functioning and behavior by observing and conducting personal interviews with the student. By assessing the student's performance of various tasks, the travel trainer develops a profile of the student's functional abilities, needs, experiences, and motivation. The travel trainer fully explains the process and desired outcomes of travel training to the student and his or her family, who

must give consent before travel training can begin. Everyone involved in travel training must agree that the student will be allowed to travel independently if she or he successfully completes travel training.

Does the idea of traveling independently make students nervous?

Yes, initially, many students express anxiety about traveling alone. A student's anxiety may be a reflection of his or her family's anxiety about the prospect of the student traveling independently, or simply a genuine insecurity on the part of the student, who is entering the complex world of public transportation at a disadvantage.

The assessment process often indicates that students, especially those with moderate to severe developmental disabilities, have little or no concept of the meaning of being "alone" and may have difficulty understanding the concept of independent travel. Beginning with the assessment process, travel training should gradually but fully introduce students to independent travel, taking care to slowly reduce their anxiety and that of their families.

What happens during travel training?

A travel trainer usually begins training a student at the student's residence, which allows the trainer to:

- observe the student in a familiar environment
- reassure the family through daily contact
- assess the student's home environment at regular travel times for potential problems, and
- remind the student's family of the independent aspect of independent travel that is, the student will be acting independently in the everyday world, outside the family's care.

Travel training should occur at the time of day when a student will later be traveling independently, so that a trainer can assess the effectiveness with which the student handles the noise, varying light, crowds, fatigue, busy intersections, and empty streets associated with a particular route, and adjust travel training accordingly. Travel training should continue through inclement weather, so students can get used to using an umbrella, traveling through snow and ice, and dressing appropriately for the weather. Regardless of the nature of their disability, most students need to learn the various skills required for traveling in all kinds of conditions.

In a quality travel training program, a travel trainer works with one student at a time. The trainer follows the travel route with the student and instructs the student in dealing with problems such as getting lost or taking a detour around a construction site. The trainer should teach the student to make decisions, deal with the consequences of decisions, and maintain appropriate safety and behavior standards.

When a student successfully performs all the skills necessary for safe travel along a chosen route in the company of a trainer, most travel training programs send the student on a "solo" trip, during which the student travels alone on a bus or train, and the trainer follows behind in a car or in an adjacent train car. During this initial solo trip, the student is aware that she or he is being followed by the trainer.

While the "solo" trip is an appropriate means of determining a student's travel skills, the "solo" trip does not give the trainer information on how the student manages while traveling alone and independently. Different travel training programs will obtain this information using different methods. For example, a student in the New York City Board of Education Travel Training Program is followed again after successfully completing a "solo" trip, this time by a travel trainer unknown to the student. This new travel trainer assesses the student's performance when the student believes he or she is truly traveling alone and independently or an "observation solo" trip. The trainer, remaining unknown, observes the manner in which the student handles the responsibilities of traveling alone, but stays close enough to ensure the student's safety if intervention is required. Whether or not a travel training curriculum includes an "observation solo" trip at the end of a travel training program, a travel trainer should give the student, the student's family, and whomever initially referred the student for travel training a recommendation or written report regarding the student's ability to travel safely and independently.

Why are travel training programs necessary?

Being able to get around on one's own accord is an important component of independence; this is as true for people with disabilities as it is for those without disabilities. Nearly all people who have disabilities can (with training and the use of accessible vehicles) board, travel on, and exit a public transportation vehicle. However, a certified travel training program is often needed to teach people who have a disability to do so safely and independently. Programs that maintain high quality procedures for travel training are crucial in helping people who have a disability to develop autonomy and practice their right to move freely through a community.

Who should provide travel training?

A logical place to implement travel training programs is within the public school system. As the primary providers of education for students with

a disability, local school districts have a full range of resources available to develop quality travel training programs. Since students are part of a school system for many consecutive years, educators can plan and deliver a full program of travel instruction. When a student enters the school system, this instruction can begin with activities that develop a student's sense of purposeful movement. *Purposeful movement* is the cognitive and physical ability to move safely and independently through the complex environments of school, home, and neighborhood, and includes such movements as negotiating stairs, using a telephone, boarding a bus, or crossing a street. As students progress through the school years, the various travel skills can be introduced and practiced routinely. Then, as students become young adults and are close to exiting the school system, explicit travel training can become part of their education and can form the basis of the transition from school transportation to public transportation.

Most students who successfully complete a comprehensive travel training program along one route require little additional training to learn other routes and reach other destinations. Learning purposeful movement skills early in school, then entering a travel training program in high school, reduces the time and expense required for additional travel training and helps individuals with disabilities acquire the transportation skills they will need once they leave secondary school.

While the public school system is the optimal environment in which to begin travel training, individuals with disabilities can also get travel training from independent living centers or similar agencies. More information about travel training programs local to you may be obtained from state offices that deal with developmental disabilities or by contacting some of the organizations listed in the "Resources" section of this document.

Who benefits from travel training programs?

The individual with a disability, the family, the school system, and society have much to gain from standardized, quality travel training programs. Individuals with a disability gain self esteem by traveling independently, and many students remark on how much it means to them to be "treated just like anybody else" and to be able to say "I can do it myself." Learning the skills they need also increases their access to the wider opportunities of society, including employment, post-secondary education, job training programs, and recreation. The ability to travel independently and at will provides people who have disabilities with a vital key to achieving as much participation in society as they desire.

Society, too, benefits when people with disabilities participate actively in everyday life. Travel training programs can enable students with disabilities to become adults who can travel to and from their jobs without support, who are involved citizens of their communities, and who have the opportunity to live independently.

What Equal Access to Transportation Means

by
April M. Myers

The Importance of Equal Access to Transportation

Access to transportation is the key to independence, productivity, and inclusion in community life for people with disabilities. Even after people with disabilities complete educational or vocational training and are ready to enter the work force, most discover that their choices of employment are limited by the availability of accessible transportation. Their opportunities to participate in and enjoy other activities — going to the mall, the coffeehouse, the movies, the public swimming pool, or other recreational places — may be similarly limited. If people with disabilities don't have access to public transportation or don't know how to use it safely, their lives can become isolated.

It's important that people with disabilities receive training on how to use existing transportation services safely, including public transportation. Some individuals live in communities where there are no public transportation services and must rely solely on the goodwill of others for transportation to work, school, medical services, or anywhere else they need or wish to go. It is very beneficial for everyone to learn about the transportation services that are offered in their communities by private organizations and federal, state, and local governments. All people with disabilities should be aware of their right to equal access to transportation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

My Own Experience

I am a person with cerebral palsy, who grew up in a rural community in which my primary means of transportation was my mother's dedication to helping me include myself in my community. As with many children, everything was fine until I reached

adolescence and wanted more independence from my mother. I became a rebellious teenager, depressed because my disability seemed to be determining my future, and I often dreamed of running away from home. A member of my family was always close by, knowing and watching everything that I did and everywhere that I went. I felt as if I had no privacy, no space of my own to grow up in, and no time just to experiment with life and relationships. I needed breathing room to discover who I really was, space to figure out for myself where I could fit into society, and the time to determine what I could do for myself.

Thankfully, throughout the difficult years of high school and college, my mother's devotion to providing me with transportation did not diminish, and she often went to extreme lengths just to see her daughter smile. She would drive two hours each way to take me to skiing lessons and would take me to clubs to go dancing, then return at 1:00 a.m. to pick me up when the club closed. I was very lucky to have had the opportunity to develop my social skills, participate in recreational activities, experience the fun side of life, and become a member of my community.

While I was in college, my mother was diagnosed with leukemia and was no longer able to provide me with transportation. This was when I truly discovered what isolation meant, and I came to the realization that no one was standing in line to volunteer to provide me with my personal transportation service. I was fortunate enough to have a friend living in Washington, DC, who invited me to come stay with him for a week.

During my visit to DC, I had my first taste of freedom on a subway and bus system. I learned by trial and error how to access and use the public transportation system. After each successful experience, I found the confidence to venture farther and farther from my friend's apartment. I felt empowered, in control of determining how my time was spent. For the first time, I had a role in shaping the literal direction of my life.

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Two years after my visit to DC, I decided to move there. I packed my bags in hopes that the freedom of public transportation would enable me to achieve a lifestyle of independence, productivity, and inclusion for which I had been looking for so long.

It has been almost seven years now since I moved to DC. My independence has become my personal strength and has allowed me the opportunity to have a career and to advance within my profession.

Where to Look for Travel Training Programs

Various service providers and community projects offer travel training programs to their service populations. As is the case with most disability-related programs, each training program has its own eligibility criteria and guidelines for program participation. Many programs concentrate on specific types of disability, which makes it easier for staff members to become experts on training techniques and possible accommodations for the specific needs of their students. While some programs offer their services solely

The first time her daughter 16-year-old Jennifer, who is deaf, went on a public bus Joan was plagued with concerns. Can she do this? What if she misses her stop? What if she gets lost? Will I ever see her again? Jennifer had gotten an after-school job and needed to ride the bus to get there. "I wanted her to have a job," said Joan. "I thought it was important for her to feel independent." Everything went fine and Jennifer has been using public transportation, both the buses and the subway system for over three years now. "She's a whiz," says Joan. "She's much better at using public transit than I am, because she does it everyday. In the beginning it was very hard, but I knew I had to let her go. I think that parents tend to hold their kids with disabilities back. But, they probably know much more than we give them credit for."

on an individual basis or in small groups, others offer a combination of services that can provide the necessary flexibility for many individuals with various disabilities.

Public and private schools, Centers for Independent Living, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, MR/DD Programs, and the Lighthouses for the Blind Program either directly offer travel training programs or can make referrals to community providers of travel training. High schools may offer travel training courses or may make arrangements with a community travel training program to offer travel training to students with disabilities. Often organizations that train seeing, hearing, and companion dogs will train individuals who apply for their services on how to use public transportation safely with the assistance of their service animal.

Many training projects are funded through government grants and are offered at no cost to the individual. Training curricula vary from project to project, according to the varieties of transportation services available in the community and the project's targeted student population. The curricula of a travel training program should be flexible enough to accommodate individual learning styles, various types and levels of disabilities, and the goals and needs of the individual.

When selecting a travel training program, it is important to select a program that has worked with people who have your particular disability. It is critically important that the trainers have enough flexibility to modify the training program to accommodate your learning style and needs. Ask about the qualifications of the trainers, about safety policies, and for references from people like you.

While it may be useful for the program to include classroom instruction, the greater part of a training program should emphasize hands-on travel training. The trainer should be available if necessary to assist an individual in learning routes of travel, such as from home to work, work to the movies, school to home, or home to the grocery store. The training program and its staff should be sensitive to the individual desires and lifestyles of the individuals who are participating in their program. Some training programs, notably Centers for Independent Living, employ individuals with disabilities as their trainers.

In Closing

For some individuals with disabilities, the Americans with Disabilities Act has opened up new doors to their community and has enabled them to access transportation services for the first time. However, the majority of individuals with disabilities still remain unaware of their rights under the ADA and lack information and training on how to use public transportation systems. Community services organizations, educational and vocational programs, and transportation providers can work together to reach people with disabilities and to develop creative projects and solutions to meet their transportation needs. With access to dependable transportation, the goals of independence, productivity, and inclusion for many people with disabilities will be greatly enhanced.

Travel Training for Persons with Cognitive or Physical Disabilities: An Overview

by Patricia J. Voorhees, Travel Training Specialist
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This article provides an overview of many critical travel issues — and, thus, the training issues — encountered by people who have cognitive disabilities or physical disabilities. While a person with a cognitive disability needs to be able to perform the same travel activities as a person with a physical impairment (e.g., find out needed travel information, plan the trip, access the transportation vehicle in the right place, and so on), the actual travel training that each person receives will vary considerably, due to the differing nature of their disabilities.

Travel Training Guidelines for People with a Cognitive Disability

Traveling independently on public transportation is one occasion when a person with a cognitive impairment must perform with absolutely no assistance. Training a person with a cognitive impairment to use public transportation requires a comprehensive and individualized instructional program. Before a person with a cognitive disability can safely use public transportation, she or he must demonstrate 100% consistency in many functional skill areas, beyond simply learning the travel route to and from a destination.

Before travel training begins, a travel trainer determines a student's strengths and weaknesses, assesses how much support the student can expect from her or his parents or guardians, and reviews the travel route to determine the feasibility of traveling to a specific destination. Travel training begins only when the student is ready to learn the travel route and has support from parents or guardians. It's notable that a student with a cognitive

disability does not necessarily have to know how to read a clock, make change, or understand survival signs to succeed in a travel training program, though these skills certainly are assets.

A comprehensive travel training program for people with a cognitive disability should consist of the following:

Phase 1 — Detailed instruction in specific travel routes, fare costs, boarding and deboarding sites, and the demonstration of pedestrian skills necessary for this travel route, as well as constant practice in life skills such as appropriate interaction with community workers and with strangers, use of a public telephone, and appropriate behavior in public places.

Phase 2 — Direct observation of the student by the travel trainer to verify that the student has learned all necessary travel skills taught in Phase 1.

Phase 3 — Instruction in emergency procedures. Emergencies can include boarding the wrong transit vehicle, missing a stop, or losing one's fare or transfer pass.

Phase 4 — Assessment of the student's interactive skills with strangers. Travel training programs may use plainclothes police officers or travel trainers (whom the student has not met) to approach the traveling student and try to extract personal information from him or her. Students pass this assessment procedure if they do not impart personal information to or leave with a stranger.

Phase 5 — Indirect observation of the student. As the student walks to and from the transit stop and rides the transit vehicle independently, her or his performance is assessed at a distance by a travel trainer, who follows in a car. The student is aware that she or he is being observed.

Phase 6 — Covert observation and assessment. The student is not aware that she or he is being observed.

Phase 7 — Follow-up observations. Periodically, a student who successfully completes a travel training program should be covertly observed to verify that she or he is still practicing safe travel skills.

While different travel training programs may vary the order in which they teach travel skills, the teaching methods of travel training programs should be the same. The average length of a quality travel training program is fifteen sessions, though training time will vary according to the complexity of the travel route and the nature of the student's disability.

Once a person with a cognitive impairment begins to travel independently along one travel route, typically she or he learns other travel routes with relative ease. Sometimes the individual will generalize to a new route the training she or he received for the initial route. Other students may simply need "routing," a brief review of a new travel route. Still others may need the same intense instruction to travel to a new destination, especially if reaching the new destination requires new or more advanced pedestrian skills or different modes of transportation.

"Before travel training begins, a travel trainer determines a student's strengths and weaknesses, assesses how much support the student can expect from her or his parents or guardians, and reviews the travel route to determine the feasibility of traveling to a specific destination."

Travel Training Guidelines for People with a Physical Disability

Persons who have physical impairments may not require the intensive travel training that persons with a cognitive impairment require. Instead, travel training for people with a physical disability often focuses on developing life skills and selfassertiveness. *(For more detailed information, see the article by Sandra Samberg on page 13.)* For example, a person in a wheelchair may learn how to use a wheelchair lift, or a person with cerebral palsy may learn how to safely use an escalator or how to enter and leave a crowded subway. Individuals with physical disabilities may also learn how to appropriately ask for assistance, or how to assert their rights in traveling and other social situations. Above all, a program should first and always consider the personal safety of the student.

Practical travel training should also teach students to investigate a destination to make certain, for example, that curb cuts exist on both sides of a street or that a restaurant has accessible restrooms. Students with a physical impairment need to learn problem-solving techniques to cope with unexpected emergencies, such as missing the last train home or negotiating a large mud puddle after a rain storm. Students may also find it valuable to develop a community with persons who have similar impairments, since sharing experiences and advice within a community can be reassuring and informative and can reinforce productive behaviors.

Learning how to contact their local transit authority to obtain information on accessible transportation in their area is also a necessary skill for an individual with a physical disability. This includes finding out about regularly scheduled, fixed route services such as buses and trains, and paratransit and special travel services. Many persons who have a physical impairment never contact these providers but typically allow a family member or a friend to make contacts and procure information. A comprehensive travel training program should teach students to get this information for themselves. Students who learn to make contacts, procure information, and arrange for travel services will gain independence and confidence.

What to Look For in a Travel Training Program

When investigating travel training programs, one should thoroughly review the training procedures each program offers. Although a national movement to establish travel training standards is underway, no standards presently exist.

Some travel training programs encourage individuals with a disability, as they travel, to seek assistance from "natural helpers" — other passengers who frequently ride the same transit vehicle. However, professional travel trainers would not advocate this practice as safe or realistic. Establishing reliance on natural helpers may cause problems for the trainee, since a natural helper is likely to occasionally absent himself or herself from the transit vehicle, leaving the trainee on his or her own. It is never wise to "link" a person with a cognitive impairment to a stranger; in fact, a responsible travel training program will advocate wariness toward strangers.

Sarah, now 23 years old, who has Down syndrome, has been using public transportation since high school. She went through travel training in school, and her mother Joyce taught her how to get to her present job using the public buses. "At first I was afraid that a situation would arise that she wouldn't be able to deal with," says Joyce. "Changes in routine can throw her off. But, she's really surprised me with her ability to problem solve." Sarah has successfully handled re-routed buses, delays, and even one bus breakdown. Much of her ability to handle these situations comes from going over "what to do if..." situations with her mom. Her daily route involves changing buses and she's never missed her stop once!

Another travel training technique that some programs advocate is the use of peer trainers. One should be leery of using a developmentally disabled peer to teach travel training since training in pedestrian skills and emergency procedures can be a complex task for instruction. These and other safety issues can arise with this practice. When teaching travel training, safety should be the foremost concern of any quality program.

Many travel trainees must "unlearn" certain travel behaviors that they were encouraged to practice in the past. Trainees must learn to avoid being too friendly to strangers, to solve unexpected problems, to make decisions, and to make judgements indepedent of others (such as not running across a street when the light is red to try and "beat" an oncoming car). The family and educators of a person with a cognitive impairment should consider whether they unconsciously encourage unsafe travel practices in the student.

Summary

This article briefly described the major elements that should be addressed in a travel training program for a person with a cognitive disability and in a program for an individual with a physical disability. Clearly, while there are overlaps in the types of programs appropriate for the needs of these individuals, there are differences as well. One of the chief differences lies in the issue of safety and the difficulty that a person with a cognitive impairment may have in learning behaviors that ensure his or her safety when traveling. Safety is an issue that must never be compromised in a travel training program. When it comes to crossing the street, only 100% accuracy and safety are acceptable!

The next article in this *Transition Summary* describes in some detail a training program developed for addressing the needs of individuals with cognitive impairments. It is set in New York City, but the basic premises of this program are applicable to any urban environment, as well as some surburban localities. The subsequent article, by Sandra Krantz Samberg, provides similar detail regarding travel training for those who have physical disabilities.

A Model of a Travel Training Program — The New York City Board of Education Travel Training Program

by

Margaret M. Groce, Supervisor,

New York City Board of Education Travel Training Program

Introduction to the NYC Travel Training Program

The New York City Board of Education Travel Training Program is an example of an effective travel training program set in an urban area. While not all travel training programs follow exactly the practices of the NYC Program, travel training programs of quality will operate by practices similar to these. By reading about this model, you should be able to tell what to expect from an urban travel training program.

The Program's Background

The New York City Board of Education Travel Training Program, initiated during the 1970-71 school year by the New York City Board of Education, has roots in other programs. In 1961 the New York City Board of Education established an Occupational Training Center (OTC), the first of its kind, to teach employment and social skills to students with moderate to severe developmental disabilities. School bus transportation was not provided for students of the OTC, and soon it became apparent that many people with moderate and severe developmental disabilities were not making use of the OTC because they were unable to use public transportation to reach it. OTC staff recognized that travel training on public transportation was a vital component of an occupational and vocational training program.

The NYC Travel Training Program was initially designed to teach adolescent students with moderate to severe developmental disabilities to travel independently on public transportation from home to school and back. The program demonstrated a high degree of success and soon began to offer travel training to students with a wide range of disabilities. The program does not offer training to people with a visual impairment, who must receive travel training from mobility specialists. *(For information about mobility training for students with visual impairments, see the article by Elga Joffee on page 15.)*

> *"Because of the travel training skills they gained through the program, these graduates have subsequently enjoyed a significant degree of personal independence."*

Entering the Program

The students in the program range in age from 15 to 21, exhibit moderate to severe limitations in their ability to travel independently, and in most cases are referred to the program by school personnel, who complete a Travel Training Questionnaire and Pupil Profile for each student they refer. Students may also be referred to the program by agencies that provide vocational and prevocational training for people with a disability. Students and families of students may also request travel training by contacting the Travel Training Office directly. Students are considered eligible for the program's one-to-one training when their families have consented to travel training and after they demonstrate three basic, personal abilities:

1. An awareness of personal space — meaning a clear idea of where their personal space ends and that of others begins. For safety reasons, students must not enter the personal space of others in an inappropriate way while traveling on public transportation. Travel training cannot proceed if students do not have this awareness. The NYC Program provides training in personal space awareness.

2. An awareness of their environment. Students must be able to recognize sufficient details of their environment, so as to move purposefully and safely through it. Students must be able to focus their attention long enough to safely negotiate the travel environment.

3. The ability to recognize and respond to danger.

A student's personal qualities are also very important to successfully completing travel training. The student must be motivated to learn to travel independently. One of the tasks of a travel trainer is to illustrate clearly the benefits of independent travel to a prospective student.

A travel trainer considers such factors as age, type of disability, and severity of disability when planning a students training program. Students who have a severe developmental disability should receive individual travel training instruction before they are 21 years old or before they leave their public school program. After students complete a travel training program and before they

learn other travel routes, they should travel to one destination only, until they are thoroughly familiar with all the elements of reaching that destination. This measure ensures that students have learned basic travel skills before they attempt new routes.

The Program's Components

Content. The NYC program teaches a student to travel safely from home to a certain destination, and back. The program also teaches travel skills such as finding the safest and most direct travel route to and from a destination, negotiating street crossings, recognizing and avoiding dangerous situations, asking for help in an appropriate and safe manner, and using appropriate social skills while traveling.

Assessment. Through a series of observations, tasks, and interviews, trained staff members evaluate each student referred to the NYC Travel Training Program to determine the student's competency in skills essential for safe, independent travel. Trainers assess the student's motivation to travel independently, obtain an agreement from the student's family that the student will be allowed to travel independently on public transportation after completing the program, decide on an initial travel route to be learned (such as home to work and back), and consider the time and effort required to reach this destination in light of a student's abilities and disabilities.

Designing a training plan. An individual instructional program is designed for each student, based on the results of her or his assessment. The safest and most direct route from the student's home to the school or training facility is determined. For identification purposes a photograph is taken of each student participating in the program, and an identification card providing information about the student's

Courtesy of the NYC Board of Education Travel Training Program

What You Should Know About Your Travel Training Program

When investigating travel training programs, you should review the training procedures each program offers or look over training provided by your son or daughter's school. Although a national movement to establish travel training standards is underway, no standards presently exist. To determine the quality of the program available, you might want to ask some of the following questions.

- What kind of training have the travel trainers had?
- Does the travel trainer have experience working with students who have the same or similar disabilities and needs as your son or daughter?
- Who supervises the travel trainer?
- What are the safety policies for this program and what safety skills are taught to the student?
- How does the travel trainer communicate with the school and with the family? How often?
- Are students' records maintained in a professional and confidential manner, in conformity with the IEP requirements?
- How much time is spent with travel training in the classroom? How much time in actual travel?
- How is student progress evaluated and what are the criteria for independent travel?
- Can you be put in touch with someone who has completed this training program?

disability and travel route is issued to the student.

The trainers. Paraprofessionals, who have received extensive training in practices, procedures, and strategies necessary for teaching students with disabilities to travel on public transportation, provide travel instruction. These paraprofessionals are supervised by travel training teachers.

The training procedure. The actual training procedure will vary according to the nature of the student's disability. Certainly one of the challenges of training students to travel is to assess the student's disability and design a suitable travel training curriculum for her or him. *(For details on training students with physical, cognitive, and/or sensory disabilities, see the various articles throughout this publication.)*

The start of travel training. Recognizing that many students have the potential to learn how to travel but lack the skills required, teachers from the NYC Travel Training Program, whenever possible, provide basic training to students in purposeful movement while the students are within the public school system. Training in *purposeful movement* teaches a student fundamental skills, such as moving through a school building independently, using a telephone, carrying and using keys properly, asking for assistance, and becoming aware of the environment. This training occurs before actual travel training begins. It is important to begin this training at an early age, to ease the transition from the school environment to the community and the workplace. Beginning early is especially important for people who have severe disabilities.

Personnel from the NYC Travel Training Program frequently visit NYC public schools and interact with students, teachers, and parents. Travel training staff teach purposeful movement skills to students as young as age five or six. They encourage parents to help their child become more independent. Travel training staff work in public schools all through the school year, teaching students street-crossing skills and taking them for rides on public transportation.

The duration of travel training. The duration of a travel training curriculum varies according to a student's disability. The average travel training curriculum requires 13 days to complete, although a few curricula are shorter, and some last as long as six weeks. A travel training curriculum is considered complete only when the student can travel independently and safely.

Working with the student's family. The program also addresses concerns that a student's parents or guardians may have about the student undertaking independent travel. While a student is in the program, the student's travel trainer maintains daily contact with the student's family, in

person, by telephone, and through a daily note that summarizes the day's activities and the student's progress. Travel trainers also participate in parent workshops at schools and agencies to explain the travel training program and encourage families to consider all transportation alternatives. (Note: Some travel training programs train parents along with their children. Many parents are unfamiliar with public transit. Training can alleviate many of the fears they have about their children using public transportation.)

Follow-up training. Some students, depending on the nature of their disability, are periodically assessed at intervals after successfully completing a travel training program. If necessary, these students are given follow-up training to refresh their travel skills.

The Program's Successes

The NYC Travel Training Program trains between 250 and 300 students with moderate to severe disabilities each year, giving them the knowledge and skills necessary to travel to work, school, and recreational sites using public transportation. During its 25 years of operation, the program has trained over 7,500 students; of these 7,500, about 5,000 have had moderate and severe developmental disabilities, and the other 2,500 have had moderate to severe learning disabilities, deafness, multiple impairments, and emotional disabilities.

The NYC program receives close to 800 referrals each year. Of these, 700 receive individual assessments for travel training, and about 560 are accessed as having the basic skills required for learning to travel. An average of 300 students receive the one-on-one training. (The difference in the number of students assessed as eligible and the number who participate in the program is due to lack of parent response, or refusal to permit independent travel.) Eighty-five percent of the students learn to use public transportation safely and independently. Because of the travel training skills they gained through the program, these graduates have subsequently enjoyed a significant degree of personal independence.

Travel Training for People With Physical Disabilities

by

Sandra Krantz Samberg, M.A., P.T.

A journey by public transit begins the moment a person decides to travel by public transit from one place to another. When they travel, people with disabilities have to consider and plan every minute detail of their journey. They have to choose a destination and a route of travel, decide how much money to bring for fares, and select appropriate clothing. After making these decisions they must then physically execute certain actions: exiting the home, getting to the transit stop, and boarding the transit vehicle. Independent travel requires a coordination of planning and action that many of us perform every day and take for granted, but which people with disabilities must consider with care.

Laying the Foundations for Traveling When Children are Young

With many children, travel training begins at a very early age, when parents begin to enlist their young child's help in making decisions while traveling. Parents might instruct their child to watch the changing of the traffic light and teach them to associate its colors (red, yellow, green) with the actions of stopping or going. This instruction continues with teaching the child to look both ways before crossing a street, asking for input on locating bus stops, depositing transit fare, and asking for transfers or where to stand on a subway platform or whom to go to, should they get lost. Eventually, the young child is equipped with the safety information, travel knowledge, and physical skills necessary to travel independently.

However, children with physical disabilities, unlike their non-disabled peers, often do not have a chance to develop the cognitive and physical skills that they need for traveling independently on public transportation. Because they have a physical disability, they often rely on other people to transport them from place to place, and so they never learn the essential skills for traveling safely. Children with physical disabilities may find their range of movement restricted if, for example, they are not taught to safely get across a street to a bus stop, or if they do not learn to use subway tokens or bus transfer passes. Without such instruction, these children cannot be expected to safely and independently use public transportation.

Experience helps children develop travel skills, and all children should be allowed to have travel experience beginning with basic personal mobility. Even children who have severe physical disabilities, such as a child who uses a wheelchair but requires someone to push the chair, should be allowed to gain the experience needed to develop travel skills. Using this case as an example, the child in the wheelchair should be

instructed in basic travel skills such as obeying traffic signals and then should be allowed to demonstrate these skills by telling the person pushing the wheelchair when to cross the street. As a child verbally directs travel, she or he is gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to eventually travel independently.

"Independent travel requires a coordination of planning and action that many of us perform every day and take for granted, but which people with disabilities must consider with care."

Beyond the Basics: The Role of Travel Training Programs

Travel training programs offer travel training beyond the basic training that parents or guardians give to growing children with physical disabilities. These programs are customized to fit the needs of each student's unique abilities and disabilities. When a professional travel training instructor designs a travel training program for a young student, she or he will assess the physical and cognitive abilities and disabilities of the student.

The travel skills that students must learn. Students will need to move through indoor and outdoor environments. Skills such as opening doors and negotiating hills, ramps, curbs, curb cuts, and steps are important, and a student's capacity to accomplish these tasks should be assessed at the start of the training program. Endurance is also very important to a child's ability to travel independently. Is the student physically able to leave her or his home, travel to a transportation stop, wait for a bus or subway, board and then reach and disembark at the final destination? Another important consideration is the student's standing and ambulatory balance. Will wind, rain, snow, ice, or crowds cause the student to fall easily? Can the student maneuver in tight spaces, as during rush hours when subway platforms and cars are packed? A student who has poor balance or poor endurance can still be expected to travel independently, but modifications should be made to the training program to accommodate his or her needs. The student might be instructed to use a less crowded route or to travel only during non-rush hours. Bus stops near places to sit down might be suggested if the student cannot stand for long periods. If a bus stop is at the top of a hill and the student cannot climb the hill, then another route should be planned. A student who cannot use the steps to enter the bus will need to be taught how to use a bus lift. Students who are ambulatory will need to practice walking forward, backward, and sideways, going up and down steps (including curbs, ramps, and curb cuts); and opening doors, sitting down and getting up, and operating a traffic signal.

Using a wheelchair. Many of the students who enter travel training programs use wheelchairs for mobility. Students who use wheelchairs will need to acquire the skills described above and must be able to propel the wheelchair forward and backward, and make turns in tight spaces. A student who uses a manual wheelchair should be taught (if possible) how to do a wheelie to jump small ledges. Students using motorized wheelchairs, however, cannot do wheelies, because a motorized chair is too heavy. Because of this, their wheelchairs might not be able to go over the difference in height between a train and the platform level. In these cases — and in the case of students who cannot propel a manual wheelchair but who do not have a motorized wheelchair — it is necessary to teach students how to verbally direct someone to assist them. When a student can verbally direct a helper, then independent travel is an attainable goal.

Often, people with physical disabilities travel by private car or van, an ambulette service, or an accessible school bus. When riding a bus, students who use a wheelchair

Since Jerome began using public transportation in high school there's been no holding him back. "At first I was a little nervous," said his mom Evy, "but after I met with the travel trainers at his school, I felt confidant that he'd be well prepared to handle everything." "I needed to get to the rec center after school to go swimming," said Jerome, "the only way to get there was the bus." By going through travel training, and learning how to safely maneuver his wheelchair onto bus lifts, Jerome has greatly expanded the range of his world. Now, at age 19, he takes the bus to a local community college in Denver, where he is studying the core science courses he'll need when he transfers to a four-year university where he plans to study mechanical engineering.

are instructed to enter the bus lift backward, engage their brakes, and tell the bus operator when they are ready. Having boarded the bus, the student is instructed to use the tie down and the seat belt and to lock the wheelchair brakes. The student must then inform the bus operator of his or her stop in advance and also signal for the stop. The student is taught to exit the bus by entering the lift facing forward or out of the bus, and locking the brakes.

The present tie-down system for wheelchairs on most buses cannot accommodate most motorized wheelchairs. Students in a motorized wheelchair should be instructed to position the wheelchair so that the front casters are facing the inside wall of the bus, and to ensure that the motor is turned off and that the brakes are engaged. Students using manual wheelchairs should also be instructed to turn their front casters to face the side of the bus and to engage the brakes, as the tie downs sometimes will pop open.

In Conclusion

These are just some of the considerations that must be addressed in travel training programs for students who have physical disabilities. As can be seen, many issues — maintaining balance, having sufficient endurance, knowing how to ensure safety when using a wheelchair — will depend primarily upon the nature of the student's physical disability, and therefore, it is important that the travel training program be customized for each student's needs and concerns. With this individualization of instruction, and with the awareness of what traveling by public transportation requires in terms of general and quite specific skills, individuals who have physical disabilities can learn how to access and use the transportation systems that can carry them forward into productive jobs and a fulfilling life within their community.

Teaching Travel Skills To Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

by

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National Program Associate, American Foundation for the Blind

What are some key travel issues that people with a visual impairment face?

Gathering information, whether from physical surroundings, posted signs, or other passengers, is an important concern for travelers who are blind or visually impaired. When traveling by bus, rail, or paratransit vehicle, individuals with a visual impairment require information to plan their travel; to establish and maintain orientation or sense of direction; to find their way when traveling to or within transit facilities and vehicles; and to protect themselves from potential hazards in their environment. When they use mass transit, travelers who are blind or visually impaired must consider their entire journey — from their point of origin to their final destination — when gathering information for travel.

Print signs and other displayed information in mass transit environments are usually inaccessible to persons with visual impairments, thus limiting the information that is readily available for effective and efficient travel. Travelers with visual impairments are specifically concerned about access to the following features of mass transit facilities:

- route, timetable, and fare information
- print or graphic messages on displayed signs, monitors, and maps
- information about the layout of transit stations, bus stops and depots, and transit vehicles, and
- information about the location of fare gates, token booths, vending machines, information kiosks, stairs, elevators, escalators, and boarding platforms.

Once travelers with visual impairments have boarded a transit vehicle, it's very important for them to know each stop the vehicle arrives at, and to have access to information displayed on monitors, signs, and system maps within the vehicle itself.

Safety during travel in transit environments, as in all environments, is another serious concern for persons who are blind or visually impaired. Common hazards that people with visual impairments encounter in transit environments include parcels left haphazardly on narrow rail boarding platforms; crowds that jostle and push; and unprotected platform edges that precipitate into an open track bed — which travelers with visual impairments often refer to as "the pit." Effective use of specialized travel techniques, known as orientation and mobility (O&M) techniques, and certain environmental design features required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, such as tactile warning strips installed along the edges of train platforms and information in braille, enable travelers to secure the information and protection they need for safe and effective travel.

How can children and youth with visual impairments enter a travel training program?

Children and youth who have a visual impairment are eligible to receive travel training instruction, commonly referred to as orientation and mobility (O&M) instruction, as part of their special education program. These services can be provided starting in early intervention programs for infants and toddlers

and should be written into a student's Individual Family Service Plan. School-aged students need to have these services specifically included in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Transition Program.

"Children and youth should begin learning travel skills as soon as possible — that is, as soon as a child's visual impairment is identified by the family physician or immediately after a vision loss occurs later in childhood."

O&M instruction is provided by licensed or certified teachers of the visually impaired who have received specialized training in orientation and mobility. O&M instruction provided through a school program is individualized to address a student's needs during the school years and focuses on teaching the skills required for daily travel. Instruction often takes place in both school and community settings and is provided on a one-to-one basis, with the student's family and entire educational team assuming integral roles in the O&M program.

Young adults who have completed their public or private school education and who have entered the vocational rehabilitation system may require O&M services to successfully complete the transition to an adult lifestyle. These services can be provided directly by O&M instructors on the staff of a state vocational rehabilitation agency, by private rehabilitation agencies for the blind working under contract with a state agency, or by private instructors retained on a fee basis by either a state agency or a private rehabilitation service provider. These services may be delivered using a center-based program model, a field-based program model, or a combination of the two. For example, a young adult learning to travel from home to a job site may receive O&M instruction at a rehabilitation center to develop specific travel skills and then receive field-based O&M services to learn the travel route from home to work.

Who are the service providers that teach travel skills to persons with visual impairments?

O&M services in schools and rehabilitation settings are provided by O&M instructors, who are also known as O&M therapists, O&M specialists, or peripatologists. O&M instructors in schools are teachers of the visually impaired who have certification in O&M from the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind or Visually Impaired (AER). They can be assisted by O&M Assistants (OMAs), who are paraprofessional instructors trained by O&M specialists to perform certain teaching and monitoring tasks. There are 17 university teacher training programs in the United States at which O&M specialists can receive training at the undergraduate and graduate levels (a list of these universities is available from American Foundation for the Blind, which is listed under "Resources" at the end of this document). Some of these universities offer certificate programs that allow individuals with bachelors or masters degrees to complete a concentration in O&M course work without completing the requirements for a masters degree.

When is the best time for children and youth with a visual impairment to learn travel skills?

Children and youth should begin learning travel skills as soon as possible — that is, as soon as a child's visual impairment is identified by the family physician or immediately after a vision loss occurs later in childhood. Early instruction in moving safely and purposefully through the daily living environment will enhance a student's capacity for effective independent travel. Early intervention programs for infants and toddlers who have a visual impairment include instruction in basic indoor and outdoor O&M skills and techniques, while focusing on the child's development of conceptual, social, and environmental awareness as well as the sensorimotor skills related to travel. O&M instruction for toddlers may also include an introduction to the use of mobility tools such as small travel canes or modified cane devices, depending on the individual needs of the student.

What are some methods of teaching orientation and mobility?

It is important that students with visual impairments learn travel skills in their natural daily travel environments, preferably in the actual settings where they will use their mobility skills. For example, when students learn to use their arms and hands to trail along a wall or similar surface or learn to use a cane to follow along a grassline, this instruction should

take place at home and at school to facilitate daily living activities, such as traveling from the classroom to the cafeteria or leaving the school building to go to the playground. Similarly, students need to learn to cross streets by developing auditory, motor control, judgment, and cane skills at intersections in their home and school communities or at locations that are characteristic of intersections found in the communities where they will be traveling.

Instruction in the use of mass transit — trains and buses — should also be community-based. Often a transit system will make a bus or a train available to O&M instructors to use for initial lessons in familiarizing students with the layout of the vehicle and for introducing methods of boarding, paying a fare, locating a seat, maintaining orientation en route, and disembarking at the desired destination.

Students who have other impairments besides their visual impairment can and do learn to travel safely and efficiently. O&M and communication techniques and instructional approaches are modified to accommodate these students' unique learning needs. O&M instructors collaborate with occupational and physical therapists to teach students with sensorimotor or orthopedic impairments to use mobility devices and adapted techniques, to install electronic probes or curb feelers on wheelchairs and walkers, to coordinate the use of a support cane with the use of a mobility cane, and to develop exercises to facilitate maximum motor use for travel.

O&M instructors work with communication specialists to teach students with cognitive, speech, or hearing impairments to develop effective communication skills for use when traveling. Instructors also work with students' families and educational teams to assure repetitive and consistent opportunities for students to use mobility skills throughout the day. When teaching travel skills to students with multiple impairments, it is crucial to adopt a team approach in which the responsibility for the student's education is shared among team members.

What can children and youth with a visual impairment and their families expect from O&M services?

O&M services will teach purposeful, graceful, safe, and effective travel skills that will allow children and youth to carry out their daily living needs and keep pace with the incre-asingly complex environments they will encounter as they mature. Families and students can expect to be involved in all aspects of assessment, goal setting, planning, and implementation of O&M instruction.

How does one evaluate the quality of programs that teach travel skills?

Three important elements should be considered when reviewing the quality of an orientation and mobility (O&M) program provided by an educational system: the program's structure, the instructional process, and outcomes of instruction. With respect to each element, the following needs to be considered:

Program Structure: How extensive is the instructor's case load, and how often is service provided? Service that is provided sporadically is likely to be of little impact. Is an OMA available to assist the O&M instructor and to practice selected travel skills with the student? Does the O&M instructor receive adequate supervision and support from the school or agency where he or she is employed? Does the instructor have access to professional journals, in-service training, professional mentoring? Have the O&M instructors graduated from a recognized university personnel preparation program in orientation and mobility? Are instructors in rehabilitation programs, and teachers in educational settings, certified by AER in orientation and mobility?

Instructional Process: Are the student and family involved in all critical aspects of assessment, goal setting, program planning, and implementation? Does the O&M instructor provide adequate in-service education and support to the educational team, including the student's family? Are student records maintained in a professional and confidential manner, and in conformity with IEP requirements? Are families satisfied with the frequency and quality of the communication between the O&M instructor and home? Are services provided in environments in which the student will need to travel, and in accordance with the family's preferences and values?

"O&M services will teach purposeful, graceful, safe, and effective travel skills that will allow children and youth to carry out their daily living needs and keep pace with the increasingly complex environments they will encounter as they mature."

Instructional Outcomes: Do the student and family believe that the student is working toward realistic goals — that is, goals that are neither too ambitious nor too modest? Is the student acquiring travel skills during the school years to carry out age appropriate school and daily living activities? Are the student and family comfortable with the student's knowledge of travel and safety skills and the student's level of independence? After the student completes the program, is he or she able to comfortably and safely carry out travel for personal, social, and vocational activities?

In Conclusion

Visual impairment, including blindness, brings with it a host of special needs and concerns when an individual with such a disability travels. Gathering information from and about one's environment is a certain challenge to the traveler who is visually impaired, and safety is always a concern. Yet, with the help of a properly trained and certified orientation and mobility instructor and with training that begins early in the individual's life and continues to evolve in terms of skill development, individuals who have visual impairments can learn the skills they need to travel safely on public transportation.

Public Transportation and the Americans with Disabilities Act

by

Rosalyn M. Simon, Ph.D.

An Introduction to the ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act (the ADA) of 1990 is a comprehensive civil rights law that sets forth provisions for full societal access for individuals with disabilities. As a result of this legislation, people with disabilities have gained sweeping protection against discrimination in public and private establishments and when using public services such as public transportation. This section of this NICHCY *Transition Summary* provides an overview of the ADA's requirements for accessible transportation, the varieties of accessible transportation that are utilized in this country, and the steps that still need to be taken to bring about full accessibility and compliance with the ADA.

The effect of the ADA is to make unlawful any discrimination against people who have disabilities. The purpose of the ADA is:

> (1) to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities; (2) to provide clear, strong, consistent, enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities; (3) to ensure that the Federal Government plays a central role in enforcing the standards established in this Act on behalf of individuals with disabilities; and (4) to invoke the sweep of Congressional authority, in order to address the major areas of discrimination faced day-to-day by people with disabilities.

People with disabilities, according to the ADA, include individuals who have physical or mental impairments that substantially limit one or more major life functions, such as seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, breathing, learning, and performing manual tasks. This definition applies to about 49 million Americans — a conservative estimate, given the increasing numbers of elderly people and other people with conditions that are covered by the ADA.

The ADA mandates full accessibility to transportation services and basically changes the manner in which public and private transportation is provided in the United States. The ADA has far-reaching implications for the transportation industry. Its requirements for accessibility affect all modes of transportation except air travel, which is regulated by the Air Carriers Access Act of 1986 and related U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) regulations. The ADA also affects federal highways, transit systems, private transportation systems, airports, and water transportation systems. What follows is a summary description of the ADA requirements for providers of public fixed route transportation; local and state governments; federal highways; paratransit services; transportation stations, stops, and facilities; making communication services available; private providers of transportation; and providers of water transportation.

Requirements for Providers of Public Fixed Route Transportation

The ADA requires providers of public, fixed route transportation services (public transportation that follows an established route, such as a bus or subway system) to phase in accessibility as new public transportation vehicles are purchased or leased and as public transportation facilities are constructed or refurbished. Providers must furnish paratransit services to persons with disabilities who cannot use fixed route transportation services.

The ADA does not require providers to replace non-accessible vehicles with new, accessible vehicles or to retrofit non-accessible vehicles to make them accessible. However, since August 26, 1990, the ADA requires public transportation providers, when they acquire new vehicles, to purchase or lease *only* accessible vehicles.

New or leased rail and commuter trains must have at least one car per train that is accessible, as of August 26, 1995. Providers of rail and commuter train transportation must make "good faith" efforts to locate accessible train cars before purchasing or leasing inaccessible used ones. Train cars that are remanufactured to extend their use by five years or more must also be made accessible.

Requirements for State and Local Governments

State and local governments that are responsible for maintaining public streets, roads, and walkways must provide curb ramps at existing pedestrian crosswalks. As accommodations are installed in existing walkways to comply with the ADA, governments must give priority to walkways that service government offices, transportation depots, public places such as parks and theaters, and places of employment. Curb ramps must be provided at any intersection that has curbs or other barriers. New construction must be designed to accommodate people with disabilities.

Requirements for Federal Highways

The Federal Highway Act of 1973, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Surface Transportation Act of 1978 mandate accessibility to walkways, roads, highways, overpasses, underpasses, rest areas, and emergency roadside communication systems constructed with federal funds. While some existing facilities are exempt from this mandate, all plans for new construction must comply. Facilities must be accessible to persons with either physical or sensory disabilities.

Paratransit Requirements

This is one of the more sweeping changes that the ADA requires — fixed route public transportation operators must provide paratransit

Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation)

Project ACTION, Accessible Community Transportation in Our Nation, is a national research and demonstration program established to improve access to transportation services for people with disabilities and assist transit providers in implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, Project ACTION is administered by the National Easter Seal Society. It was designed to improve the relations between transit and disability consumer groups' interests as well as to augment the tools and techniques that can be used to improve transportation services for people with disabilities.

Project ACTION maintains a library of information and materials addressing accessible transportation for people with disabilities. To ensure that the knowledge created and information generated reaches transit providers and persons with disabilities, Project ACTION established the National Institute for Accessible Transportation (NIAT). Under The Institute, Project ACTION disseminates *Project ACTION Update*, a newsletter on public transportation and persons with disabilities, final reports, technical manuals, surveys, training curricula, videotapes, etc. In addition, Project ACTION is conducting a national consumer awareness campaign focusing on training persons with disabilities to use accessible fixed route transportation.

services (transportation services that do not follow a fixed route) to people with disabilities who cannot use fixed route transportation. The service area, days and hours of service, fares, response time, and passenger capacity of paratransit services must be comparable to those of fixed route public transportation services. The U.S. DOT has established three categories of riders who are eligible to use paratransit services:

"In passing the ADA, the federal government issued a clear mandate that supports full accessibility, standardizes accessible transportation services, and establishes requirements for both public and private operators of transportation services."

1. Riders who cannot independently ride, board, or disembark from a fixed route vehicle.
2. Riders who can independently use the fixed route service but for whom a fixed route vehicle is not available at the rider's time or place of travel.
3. Riders who, due to the combination of a disability-related condition and environmental barriers, cannot reach the bus or rail stop.

All fixed route public transportation providers operated by municipal, state, and federal governments must submit to the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) an initial ADA Paratransit Plan, along with annual updates describing progress toward compliance. Full compliance with all service criteria is required by January 26, 1997. Only those providers who can show that compliance will cause an undue financial burden will be granted a time extension from compliance.

Requirements for Transportation Stations, Stops, and Facilities

After January 26, 1992, any facility that is constructed or modified to provide fixed route or paratransit public transportation must be accessible to people with disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs. Intercity train and commuter rail stations must be accessible, unless the FTA grants a time extension to the provider. Time extensions for intercity rail systems can extend to 30 years, provided that two-thirds of the provider's key stations are accessible within 20 years; the FTA may give key commuter rail stations extensions of up to 20 years. New commuter and Amtrak rail systems must be constructed so that they are accessible, unless a waiver is granted. Existing Amtrak stations must be made fully accessible by July 26, 2010.

Requirements for Making Communication Services Accessible

The ADA requires public transportation providers to afford persons with disabilities, including persons with sensory or cognitive impairments, an effective means of communicating with transportation system personnel, while these travelers are within or utilizing transportation facilities. This regulation applies to a public facility's vehicle operation, print materials, and public address system. For example, information about transportation services must be available in accessible formats such as Braille, large print, or audiotapes. Teletypewriters (TTYs), interpreters, or qualified readers must be available to supplement public telephones. To facilitate on-board announcements and other communication, public address systems are required in new buses longer than 22 feet. Vehicle operators are required to announce major stops, intersections, and transfer points. At vehicle transfer points, operators are required to assist persons with a visual impairment in identifying specific buses or trains. Public address systems within transportation facilities must have a means of conveying the same or equivalent information to people with hearing loss.

Requirements for Private Providers of Transportation

The ADA prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities who use privately-operated transportation services. The law, however, distinguishes private providers of transportation into primary and secondary providers. Primary private providers are those whose main business is providing transportation to a specific clientele or to the public. An example of a primary private provider is an airport shuttle. Secondary private providers are those who provide transportation to a specific clientele or to the public, but whose vehicles are used for other purposes as well. An example of a secondary private provider is a hotel service. As in the domain of public transportation, discrimination by primary and secondary private providers on the basis of disability is illegal under the ADA. Discriminatory practices include maintaining inaccessible facilities, refusing to provide auxiliary aids and services, and refusing to remove barriers.

Although taxi companies are subject to the ADA requirements for private providers, they do not have to purchase accessible automobiles. Taxi companies that choose to purchase accessible vehicles must

ensure that the vehicles are truly accessible. Taxi companies may not refuse assistance to persons with disabilities in stowing wheelchairs or mobility aids during a ride or charge such people higher fares.

The Debate over Accessible Transportation

The ADA resolves a long-standing debate over accessible transportation services between the disability community, which has argued that people with disabilities have a basic right to accessible fixed route transportation, and the transportation industry, which has argued that the cost of making transit systems fully accessible was excessive. For more than two decades, federal policy vacillated between these opposing views, creating confusion among state and local governments, transit systems, and the disability community. But in passing the ADA, the federal government issued a clear mandate that supports full accessibility, standardizes accessible transportation services, and establishes requirements for both public and private operators of transportation services.

Some of the Complications Associated with Implementing the ADA

A law as fundamental and sweeping as the ADA is inevitably accompanied by complications. There are valid and serious problems associated with fully complying with the ADA, which are discussed below.

Senior Displacement. The ADA may well be the only civil rights legislation that may cause a loss of services to certain consumers. According to a recent study completed by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), many paratransit users who are senior citizens may be displaced by people with disabilities. According to the AARP study, one in five paratransit systems have indicated that, given their limited financial resources, they may have to deny service to senior customers who, because they have no disability, are not eligible for ADA protection, so that the transportation provider can transport customers who fall within ADA eligibility standards.

Operating Costs of Paratransit Transportation Systems. State and municipal governments have expressed grave concerns about the costs of operating or hiring the paratransit systems that are required under the ADA. The uncertainty of obtaining funds, coupled with increasing demand for services, has made it difficult for many paratransit systems to meet ADA requirements. Some paratransit systems have requested waivers to delay compliance. These requests have been refused so far, but as the compliance deadline draws near, waiver requests are likely to be submitted and accepted more frequently. One way to lessen the number of people who use paratransit services is to train people with disabilities to use fixed route public transportation.

Detectable Warnings. The U.S. DOT regulations requiring detectable warnings along rail platform edges sparked controversy in the disability community and the transit industry. These detectable warnings are placed to warn people who have visual impairments of the proximity of the rail tracks. While transit systems did not argue directly against the need for detectable warnings, they have raised concerns about the maintenance requirements and safety of detectable warnings. Transit systems voiced concerns about the large monetary investment that installing detectable warnings would require, and noted that detectable warnings have had limited testing in actual use. At the center of this issue are the safety of passengers with a visual impairment and the high cost of installing detectable warnings. Despite these concerns U.S. DOT and the U.S. Access Board ruled in favor of detectable warning strips. Installation along key station platform edges was required by July 26, 1994.

Conclusion

The goal of the ADA is to provide equal access to services for persons with disabilities. This goal has far-reaching implications for the transportation industry. Transit systems nationwide have demonstrated a willingness to comply with the letter and spirit of the law, and the general results of enacting the ADA legislation have been positive. Financial uncertainties still abound throughout the nation's transit systems, however, and many people have noted that the ADA is an expensive federal mandate that comes without federally-designated funding. The task of fully complying with the transportation requirements of the ADA rests largely in the hands of transit providers, who must apply innovative solutions to achieve full compliance and provide the disability community with fully accessible services.

"Transit systems nationwide have demonstrated a willingness to comply with the letter and spirit of the law, and the general results of enacting the ADA legislation have been positive."

Print Resources

Jacobsen, W. (1993). *The Art and Science of Teaching Orientation and Mobility to Persons with Visual Impairments*. New York: American Foundation for the Blind. Available from the American Foundation for the Blind, AFB Order Dept., 11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300, New York, NY 10001 Telephone: 1-800-232-3044. (ISBN # 0-89128-245-9)

Moon, S. (1994). *Making Schools and Community Recreation Fun for Everyone.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. Available from Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company P.O. Box 10624, Baltimore. MD 21285-0624. Telephone: 1-800-638-3775. (ISBN# 1553)

Snell, M., & Browder D. (1993). *Instruction of Students with Severe Disabilities* (4th ed.). Colombus, OH: Merril Publishing. Available from Simon and Schuster, P.O. Box 11071, Des Moines, IA 50336. Telephone: 1-800-947-7700. (ISBN# 002-413-7510) (Note: This book has a chapter dedicated to travel training.)

Uslan, M.M., Peck, A.F., Wiener, W.R., & Stern, A. (Eds.). (1990). *Access to mass transit for blind and visually impaired travelers*. New York: American Foundation for the Blind. Available from the American Foundation for the Blind, AFB Order Dept., 11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300, New York, NY 10001 Telephone: 1-800-232-3044. (ISBN 0-89128-166-5, papercover.)

Transportation Research Board (TRB). (1993). *Accessible transportation and mobility* (TR 1378). Washington, DC: TRB. Available from Transportation Board, Box 289,Washington, DC 20055. Telephone: (202) 334-3213/3214. (Note: This publication is technically written for an audience of transportation providers.)

West, J. (ed.) (1996). *Implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act.*Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers. Available from Blackwell Publishers, P.O. Box 20, Williston, VT 05495-0020. Telephone: 1-800-216-2522.

Organizations

ADA in Action
1-800-949-4232

ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) in Action are regional centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research to provide technical assistance, materials dissemination, and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act. This 1-800 number will automatically connect you with the office that serves your region. Call and ask for their publication list. It has an entire section on Public Transportation.

American Foundation for the Blind, Information Center, 11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300, New York, NY 10001. Telephone: 1-800-232-5463. Web address: http://www.afb.org/afb. E-mail: afbinfo@afb.org.

A non-profit organization founded in 1921 and recognized as Helen Keller's cause in the United States, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is a leading national resource for people who are blind or visually impaired, the organizations who serve them, and the general public. The mission of the AFB is to enable people who are blind or visually impaired to achieve equality of access and opportunity that will ensure freedom of choice in their lives.

Center for Transportation, Education, & Development, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, 161 West Wisconsin Ave., Ste. 6000, Milwaukee, WI 53203. Telephone: (414) 227-3337.

The mission of the Center for Transportation, Education, & Development is to provide quality education programs to transportation professionals. The Center provides noncredit continuing education that meets the needs of administrators, managers, supervisors, drivers, and consumers of transportation services. Their training sessions deal with subjects such as scheduling and dispatching, travel training, paratransit, passenger assistance, and cost containment.

Clearinghouse on School/Special Transportation, Sweetwood Foundation, c/o Serif Press, Inc., 1331 H Street NW, Suite 110LL, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: (202) 737-4650.

This information clearinghouse provides its members in the school transportation community with an information exchange services. Also available are a newsletter, *Transporting Students with Disabilities*, bibliographies of existing reports, legislation, surveys, test results, articles and video tapes, and a library of additional resources.

Community Transportation Assistance Project (CTAP), c/o Community Transition Association of America (CTAA), 1440 New York Ave., NW, Suite 440, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: 1-800-527-8279; (202) 628-1480.

CTAP is funded through a grant with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is a technical assistance and training project that includes a national transportation clearinghouse serving human services agencies, and provides technical assistance, electronic bulletin board services, peer-to-peer network, and training workshops and materials.

NYC Board of Education Travel Training Program, D. 75, New York City Board of Education, 22 East 28th Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10016. Telephone: (212) 545-8031; (718) 266-0085.

For details on this program see page 10.

Project ACTION, National Institute for Accessible Transportation, 1350 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 613, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: 1-800-659-6428 (Voice/TTY).

Project ACTION, Accessible Community Transportation in Our Nation, funded by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and administered by the National Easter Seal Society, is a national research and demonstration program established to improve access to transportation services for people with disabilities and assist transit providers in implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Call to get a copy of Project ACTION's extensive publication and report list.

Rural Transit Assistance Program, National Resource Center, c/o Community Transportation Association of America, 1440 New York Ave., NW, Suite 440, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: 1-800-527-8279; (202) 628-1480.

RTAP is a program of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) which provides information and technical assistance on all issues related to rural and specialized transit. RTAP has both a national program and state programs that work together in partnership. On the national level the National Resource Center offers training materials, technical assistance, and communications with the industry. Contact RTAP to get a list of your state's RTAP contacts.

Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS), National Research Council, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20418. Telephone: (202) 334-3250.

Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS) is a unique on-line computerized information file that contains both abstracts of completed research and profiles of research in progress. The TRIS mission is to acquire, provide access to, and disseminate reference materials for all transportation research projects and publications useful to administrators, engineers, operators, researchers, and other members of the transportation community. The TRIS can be accessed directly through DIALOG Information System File 63 or by contacting them directly.

US Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, The Access Board, Suite 1000, 1331 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20004-1111. Telephone: 1-800-872-2253 (Voice/TTY); (202) 272-5434 (Voice/TTY).

Since 1973, the Access Board has been the only independent federal agency whose primary mission is accessibility for people with disabilities. If the Board finds that a building or facility is covered by the Act and does not meet accessibility standards, it tries to resolve the complaint; if the complaint cannot be resolved, the Board can take legal action to gain compliance.

University Transportation Centers Clearinghouse, Ann Marie Hutchinson, Pennsylvania State University, Research Office Building, University Park, PA 16802-4710. Telephone: (814) 863-3614.

The Clearinghouse collects research studies and publishes an annual report of the work of the various university transportation centers. They maintain a library and can refer inquiries to sources of studies and publications, and disseminate research results.

NICHCY Transition Summary is published once a year to highlight issues of importance to the transition needs of young people with disabilities. In addition, NICHCY disseminates other materials and can respond to individual requests for information. For further information and assistance, or to receive a NICHCY Publications Catalog, contact NICHCY, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013. Telephone: 1-800-695-0285 (Voice/TT) and (202) 884-8200 (Voice/TT). E-mail: nichcy@aed.org. Web site: http://www.aed.org/nichcy

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