

OIB TAC

Older Individuals who are Blind – Technical Assistance Center

Knowing and Using Transportation Options for Older Consumers with Vision Loss



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Objectives

- Participants will be able to describe findings from surveys/research about transportation concerns, including COVID.
- Participants will be able to name promising practices for transportation options such as mobility management.
- Participants will be conversant with recommendations re transportation.

AFB Research Initiatives

- Project VISITOR Surveys
- Flatten Inaccessibility Curve-COVID-19 survey
- Literature review of research & transportation options including pilot programs



Visually Impaired Seniors' Independent Travel Opportunities and Resources (Project VISITOR)

- Funded by Volkswagen Group of America, Inc. Mobility-as-a-Service Team, Engineering and Innovation Center California
- Phase 1: Surveyed representatives of 32 agencies serving B/VI seniors
- Phase 2: Interviewed 81 people with vision loss by phone

VISITORS Phase 1

- A significant number of service providers said they did not know if particular modes of transportation are available in their community or not.
- 2/3 said O&M services are limited
- Over 50% said transportation not flexible or not dependable.

Purpose of the Phase 2 Study

To identify challenges, solutions, and current promising practices related to transportation for older people with vision loss age 55 and over in the United States from urban (n=52), urban cluster (n=17), and rural (n=12) communities.

Definitions

- Urban = 50,000 or more people
- Urban Cluster = 2,500 less than or equal to 50,000 people (UC)
- Rural = All other areas

Less Frequent Travel

- 29% of urban and urban cluster respondents traveled daily, compared to only one (8%) of the 12 rural respondents.
- Half of older non-drivers leave their house on any one day.
- Over 50% of urban & urban cluster respondents used subway/bus or paratransit daily/several times weekly

Latent Demand

- About 40% of urban and UC respondents wished to travel daily compared to 29% who did.
- Over 40% of urban and UC respondents said lack of transportation prevented them from doing things they needed or wanted to do, compared to 58% of rural.

Cost & Convenience

- Bus/subway service cost less in urban areas (free to \$3 per one-way ride) compared to UC areas (\$4-\$6 per one-way ride).
- Regardless of type of group, 80% of respondents reported paratransit costs were affordable.
- Affordable services ranked as less convenient.

Barriers to Paratransit – No Surprises! (n=54)

- Advance scheduling trips
- Demand exceeded availability
- Lack of flexibility
- Issues with vehicles crossing into other jurisdictions
- Amount of time in the vehicle
- Hours or days of operation

Challenges

- Knowing when the vehicle arrived for pick-up
- Knowing when the vehicle reached the destination
- Locating the entrance or specific office/store at a destination
- Needing sighted assistance to complete a task

Assistance Needed by B/VI Travelers

- Almost 2/3 said they needed help:
 - Knowing when vehicle had arrived
 - Finding the right office within the building
 - With shopping
- Very few respondents said they needed no assistance when traveling.

Findings that Impact Participants' Lifestyle

- Access/lack of access to transportation may cause participants to move/stop working.
- Inability to use bus/subway due to other health issues
- Not having access/knowledge to use a smartphone
- Affordability

Factors Affecting Mobility, Research Prior to COVID

- Older people with vision loss are more than twice as likely to report falls as sighted individuals (CDC].
- People new to vision loss lack confidence in navigating unfamiliar places, particularly those with no O&M training (Berger, 2012)

Factors Continued

- Lack of knowledge of transportation resources, how to access and use (NADTC, 2018)
- Inability to use technology to schedule and/or pay for rides (O'Day, et al, 2019)
- Financial considerations (Kirtland, et al., 2015)

Factors Continued

- Lack of accessible signage and route schedules (Crudden, 2018; O'Day, 2019)
- Laws, regulations, and restrictions for types of transports, eligibility, transportation jurisdictions, lack of certification reciprocity across states and jurisdictions (O'Day, 2019)

COVID Survey Findings Related to Transportation

- Safety issues related to physical contact, regardless of form of transport:
 - sighted guide
 - cleanliness of vehicle
 - closeness of driver/passenger
 - inability to see if other passengers are wearing protective gear.

COVID Issues #2

- Cost of transportation for rideshare has gone up; concern rideshare companies will go out of business or cut back; lack of rideshare drivers.
- Lack of medical transport.
Requirement to wait in car for medical & other types of appointments.

COVID Issues #3

- Concern loved one or friend will get sick while shopping on one's behalf.
- Inability of transit drivers to assist B/VI passengers due to fear of virus.
- Concern pilot transportation programs will be curtailed.
- Other passengers fear
 - of B/VI passengers & dog guides

Covid Issues #4

- Inability to access COVID-19 testing without the ability to drive through.
- Limited options to obtain food or supplies, and inability to use food stamps to purchase food for pick up or from delivery services.
- Public fear of people who are blind touching screens.

Covid Issues #5

- Back of bus entry is mandatory in some communities, making getting on and/ off buses impossible for some, especially those with additional disabilities.
- Change in route or transit pickup place is hard to find for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Solutions Offered by Survey Respondents

- Establish an accessible centralized website, that is updated regularly, for regional transportation information.
- Offer free Visual Interpreter Services to assist with social distancing, following lines in stores, avoiding close contact in confined areas. E.G. AIRA is interested in establishing pilot programs.

Solutions #2

- Include people with vision loss at the “table” when planning transit services/responses to situations like the pandemic.
- Provide safe transportation options for testing or getting medical help.
- Plan alternatives for those who can't use curbside pickup.

Promising Practices for Increasing Transportation Options

- Pilot programs are using smartphone apps & low-tech options to access high-tech methods for scheduling transportation. E.G. Dallas paratransit riders could opt into Lyft pilot by calling paratransit to schedule ride while monitoring arrival times & driver information through text messaging.

Promising Practices #2

- Mobility as a Service (MaaS) integrates a variety of public and private transportation services to provide end-to-end travel. Typically, a single payment covers all modes of transportation used to complete the trip.

Promising Practices #3

- Mobility Management Mobility managers coordinate rides on public transit and other transportation services for older people and people with disabilities. Transportation is managed through a central information hub.

Promising Practices #3

- Travel Training for older people and those with disabilities has been adopted by some transit agencies. Travel training optimally involves one-on-one interactions between the customer and a qualified trainer to address the rider's specific needs. It is not the same as O&M.

Promising Practices #4

- The Federal Transportation Authority Mobility on Demand Sandbox Program funds to communities to conduct research on emerging service options in combination with available technologies that allow for greater individual mobility.

Promising Practices #5

- Shared Ride Partnerships—set up by paratransit programs to address rising costs & improve customer service. Sites across the U.S. offer select paratransit riders the opportunity to participate in pilots with taxi & rideshare programs.

Reasons Prohibiting Permanent Programs for Partnerships

- A public transportation authority must be able to offer the same flexibility to every paratransit rider, not just those using a rideshare service.
- Accessible vehicles are not available everywhere. Paratransit riders using wheelchairs/scooters can't always use rideshare programs.

Reasons #2

- Some public transportation providers have not worked out a way for riders to pay for a rideshare service ride such as the unbanked.
- Current regulations require paratransit drivers to have periodic drug and alcohol screenings. Regulations for rideshare service drivers vary widely.

Reasons #3

- Disability awareness training, including the rights of riders with service animals, is not as robust or consistent for rideshare service drivers as it is for paratransit drivers, leading to driver insensitivity and ride refusal (National Academies, 2018b).

Promising Practices #6

Autonomous Vehicles have the potential to expand access. AT can be integrated into autonomous vehicles to allow B/VI people to operate vehicles without visual access. Accessibility standards must be included in the design of the vehicles.

More About Autonomous Vehicles

Key design areas should include:

- Vehicle's interface incorporates equivalent audio and/or other non-visual methods of communication.
 - Built-in means of orienting and wayfinding to/from vehicle is included.
- Warning of obstacles & traffic when entering/exiting a vehicle is provided.

Recommendations Based on AFB Research and COVID

- Incorporate solutions suggested by COVID respondents.
- Learn from COVID and plan ahead for these types of situations.
- Solicit feedback from B/VI riders; develop consistent criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of options.

Recommendations #2

- Enact consistent/coordinated policies at local, state, and national levels to provide services that are accessible across jurisdictions.
- Train transit staff on best practices in helping B/VI riders (including safety during COVID) and providing useful assistance.

Recommendations #3

- Invest in research that identifies the best transportation solutions to meet the needs of people with vision loss.
- Incorporate accessible design into autonomous vehicles from the beginning & include non-visual access methods.
- Ensure apps developed for transit systems are accessible and tested.

Recommendations #4

- Improve access to mobility management (MM) & invest the resources needed to sustain these programs in the long term.
- Ensure MM programs understand the travel needs of B/VI people & have the necessary resources to meet needs. Encourage the expansion of certification programs.

Consumer Responsibility

- Advocate
- Learn to use technology to access transportation
- Help with training transit staff
- Help with mentoring others on use of technology
- Give input on autonomous vehicles design, transit plans, regulations...

Handouts

- Using Transit Safely During COVID:
Neva Fairchild from AFB has put together a list based partially feedback from our COVID survey.
- Federal Funding Options:
See attached list

Additional Information

**Webinar: Impact of COVID on
Transportation Services for Older
Adults/People with Disabilities** July
23, 2020 @ 3:00- 4:15 pm EDT

[https://www.nadtc.org/event/the-
impact-of-covid-19-on-transportation-
services-for-older-adults-and-people-
with-disabilities-a-conversation-with-
volunteer-driver-programs/](https://www.nadtc.org/event/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-transportation-services-for-older-adults-and-people-with-disabilities-a-conversation-with-volunteer-driver-programs/)

References

- Phase 1 VISITOR Report
- Phase 2 VISITOR Report
- White Paper on Transportation Options

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OIB TAC

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OIB-TAC is developed by the National Research & Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (NRTC) at Mississippi State University to provide training and technical assistance to designated state agencies and others serving older individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) under the Department of Education, grant no. H177Z150003 receives project support from the following:

