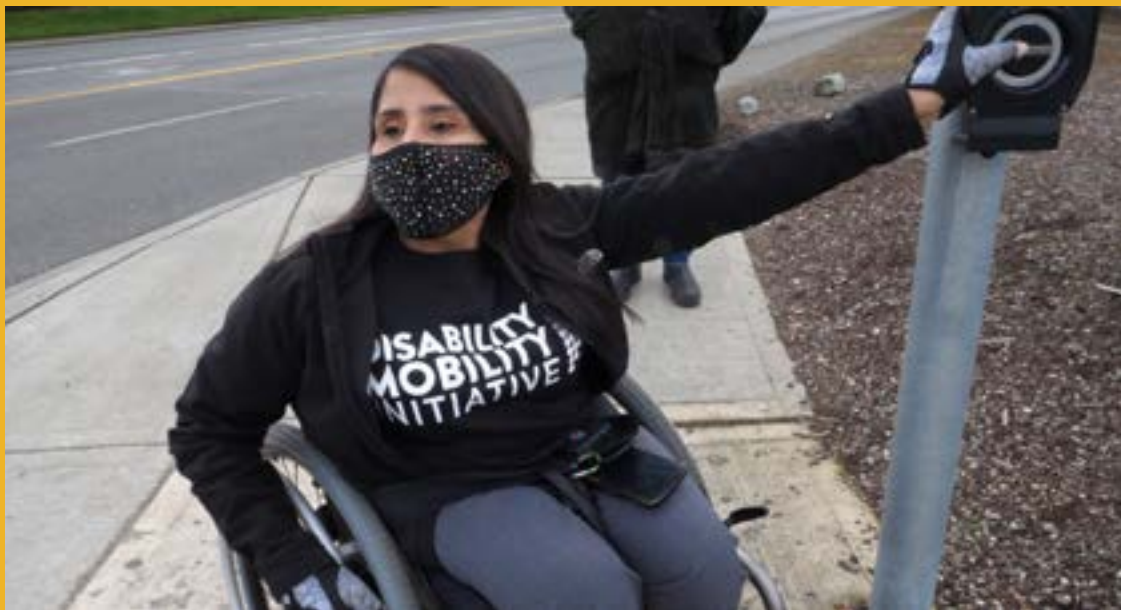


Transportation Access for Everyone: Washington State

AUGUST 2021



Produced by the Disability Mobility Initiative,
Disability Rights Washington





The Disability Mobility Initiative is a program of Disability Rights Washington, a private non-profit organization that protects the rights of people with disabilities statewide. Our mission is to advance the dignity, equality and self-determination of people with disabilities. Disability Rights Washington is a member organization of the National Disability Rights Network and serves as the designated Protection and Advocacy agency for Washington state.

Image Description: * An African American woman wearing a pink sundress walks along a rural road using a white cane. Front Page: A brown-skinned woman with long dark hair in a wheelchair reaches up to press a push button to request a walk signal at an intersection of a four-lane arterial. She wears a dark mask and dark long-sleeved jacket that is open, revealing a black t-shirt that reads "Disability Mobility Initiative."

**Note on Image Descriptions:* We asked our interviewees to describe themselves and anything they wanted to include about their identities for the Image Descriptions. If they chose not to provide us a description, we described what we saw in the image they shared with us.

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Introduction

For too long, transportation policy has been written by and for drivers. For those of us who cannot drive or cannot afford to drive, this creates major barriers for us to access school, jobs, medical care, grocery stores, religious services and everywhere else we need to go in order to fully participate in our communities.

In November 2020, the Disability Mobility Initiative began interviewing people from every legislative district in our state who are nondrivers. From these interviews, we created the Transportation Access for Everyone story map. As of August 2021, it included more than 125 stories.¹ This report advances the work started with the story map by analyzing the barriers and needs identified and framing them as policy recommendations.

The stories and analysis in this report reflect the experience of nearly a quarter of our

state's population,² a figure that is likely to increase as a larger percentage of our population ages out of driving.³ We know that Black, Indigenous and people of color, immigrants, poor people, seniors and disabled people are much less likely to have a driver license or access to a car¹ and are more likely to be transit reliant.² At the same time people of color, and people living in rural areas and on tribal lands face greater risks of being killed in traffic collisions because our communities lack accessible pedestrian and transit infrastructure,³ a trend that we have seen increase because of the suburbanization of poverty.⁴

With our years of lived experience using buses, bikes, wheelchairs and our sneakers to live our lives and participate in our communities, we are the transportation experts who best know our barriers and needs, what does and does not work.

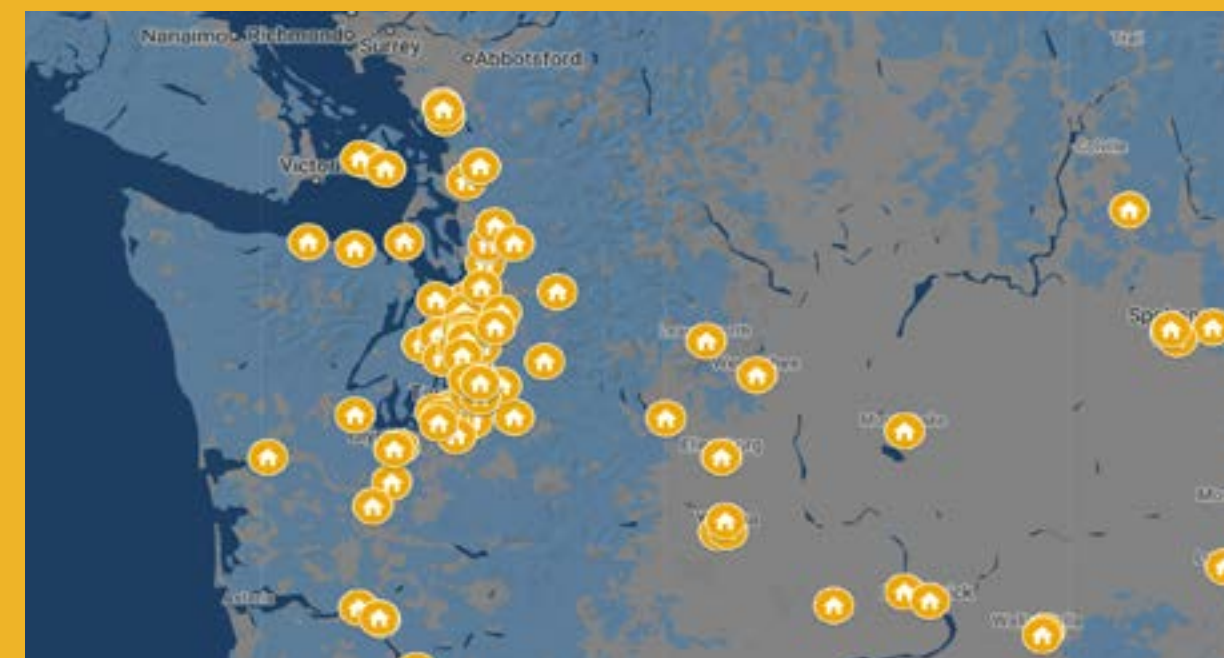


Image Description (Previous Page): A brown-skinned woman in a powerchair, waiting in front of a bus stop. She is wearing a mask, a red jacket and knee-length boots.

This Page: A map of Washington state with approximately 100 small markers in the shape of white houses in yellow markers spread across the showing where people from our story map project are from.

Acknowledgements

Deepest gratitude for everyone who took the time to interview with us and for sharing your stories. We recognize that this can be an intensely personal act, especially for those of us who have deeply internalized ableism, racism and confront other structural inequities that have misled us to believe our perspectives carry less value. Many story map participants also reached out to their personal networks to make new connections so we could expand the work, others shared critical feedback and helped us edit this document.

We also want to thank all the organizations and agencies that helped us connect to the story map participants. Doing this work in the middle of a pandemic meant that we were almost entirely reliant on the deep relationships and community building that our allies had with their communities and constituents. This would not have been possible without your support.

We especially want to thank the organizational partners that went a step further and directly conducted interviews with their constituents — Elmview, Living Well Kent and People for People. Special thanks to those that read and shared resources and ideas for our analysis and recommendations — Hopelink, Transportation Choices Coalition, Move Redmond and the Seattle Department of Transportation.

And finally, thank you to my Disability Rights Washington co-workers and Disability Mobility Initiative contractors and interns — David Carlson, Dorene Cornwell, Alex Deas, Kevin Frankeberger, Abby Griffith, Bianca Johnson, Amandeep Kaur, Kimberly Kinchen, Micah Lusignan, Krystal Monteros and Jodi Rose — for pushing the story map into existence. Special thanks to Kimberly for her work analyzing the story map and drafting the narrative and recommendations in this report.



Anna Zivarts
Director, Disability Mobility Initiative

Image Description Next Page: A brown-skinned man standing at a highway offramp holding a white cane, next to a small yellow traffic sign with an icon of pedestrian crossing and a bicycle reading "Use Caution When Crossing." Behind that is a large red and white sign reading Do Not Enter and below that a small white sign with black text reading "Pedestrians Hitchhikers Bicycles Prohibited."



How to Read This Research Paper

We did not intend to create an exhaustive list of the needs of transit-reliant disabled people or a complete set of policy recommendations. Instead, this report should be viewed as a starting point for policy-makers, elected officials, transit agencies, transportation departments, transportation advocates and civil and transportation engineers, and those in related fields, to humbly perceive their ignorance of the daily experiences of people who live differently than them and understand the urgent need for “radical” inclusion of disabled nondrivers in the planning processes across every level of our transportation systems and to begin, with urgency, to practice that inclusion.

The report is divided into fifteen individual, yet interrelated, mobility topics (see [Contents](#)). While each section details and recommendations, it is important to

remember that mobility across the state isn’t reduced to one mode, rather it is the network of transportation options that make movement possible. As we present both our analysis and recommendations in a relatively linear way, it is important to acknowledge the complexities of transportation systems. The intricacies of the transportation network become even more tangible in the lived experience of its riders.

This paper leverages the qualitative data discovered through a series of interviews with disabled Washingtonians who can’t drive, which was used to populate the statewide story map. These snapshots reveal the barriers disabled people face in trying to navigate our communities and live our lives independently, using a barebones transportation network that has historically ignored us or, at best, been assumed to have

served us sufficiently by the ticking off of a box on an engineer's list of minimal ADA requirements.

Therefore, the qualitative nature of this report should not be read as if the experiences shared represent individual, outlier cases. For example, Tanisha in West Seattle describes how the condition of the sidewalk in the few blocks from her home to the nearest bus stop is so useless and dangerous for her to navigate in her wheelchair that she instead uses the shoulder of the busy arterial road next to that sidewalk. Her experience, while unique in its details, is likely to be one that thousands of mobility device users all over our state live every day and, indeed, many of those we interviewed make the same choice Tanisha makes.¹³

We also recognize that we have yet to build the relationships we need to include stories from the tribal lands within our state. To gain a better understanding, from the national perspective of the mobility needs of tribal communities, we recommend reading the excellent "Inclusive Planning in Tribal Communities" report produced by America Walks and partners from tribal and disability organizations.⁴

As we build more relationships and organize in communities throughout our state, we are continuing to add to the story map. As this report is our first effort to reflect these lived experiences and translate them into policy terms, we have undoubtedly made omissions, which we anticipate correcting as we update and produce revised versions as the story map grows.

For now, then, consider this report a start and only a start, to incorporating disabled voices into transportation planning — from physical infrastructure to bus and train equipment and design, to wayfinding, to the administrative rules and policies that govern transit and transportation system operations, to funding structures and fiscal policy. Only when we are part of the conversation can we fully reshape our communities for inclusive mobility.

Image Description: A light-skinned man in a powerchair rolls from a crosswalk onto a curb cut. The curb cut points into the street, not the crosswalk. Next Page: A brown-skinned woman with glasses sits in a wheelchair on a sidewalk in front of a grassy area. She is smiling and has her gloved hands on the wheels.



Image Description: A light-skinned man and German Shepherd dog stand in gravel next to a two-lane highway while a light-skinned woman sits in her powerchair on the roadway. Kitsap Transit route 223 to Kariotis is pulled up before them, its nose edging over the double-yellow centerline.

Sidewalks, Curb Cuts & Intersections

Krystal

"I was trying to get to a Kmart on South Tacoma Way once. The bus dropped me off across the street. The sidewalk was fine but when I turned to go down toward the crosswalk, the sidewalk turned into loose gravel. My wheelchair's small tires dug in and I couldn't push myself out. I could see across the street to where I was trying to go, but I couldn't get to the crosswalk."

Krystal lives in Tacoma and uses a wheelchair. Her biggest barriers are the lack of sidewalks and not knowing if there are going to be curb cuts or sidewalks when she's going somewhere she hasn't been before. Krystal would like elected officials to start thinking about public transportation and sidewalks as going together instead of as two separate things. In her ideal community, sidewalks would have no cracks, private as well as public spaces would be accessible and all taxi services would be accessible. Bus routes would be placed to avoid barriers for wheelchair users and to make sure it was easy to get on and off the bus.



"Some routes stop on inclines. How is a wheelchair user supposed to even wait at that bus stop without rolling backwards? Or maybe the incline will be on grass. How do you expect me to get on grass and then the ramp to get on the bus when I'm already inclined in the weirdest position?"

Zackery

Zackery is a recent college graduate living with Blindness in Kitsap County. He travels with a white cane, navigation apps and a parrot named Oreo that's missing his right foot due to an incubator egg accident and together they help each other with their disabilities. He greatly appreciates nice, roomy, easy sidewalks to follow, with very distinct tactiles. Zackery feels that his small town's highway-centric setup limits his options given he relies on his own two feet to get around or a friend to drive.

Image Description: A light-skinned man stands holding a cane on the asphalt shoulder of a busy two-lane road. He wears a dark t-shirt and jeans.



Tanisha

Tanisha lives in West Seattle and gets around on Metro buses and her wheelchair. The biggest barriers she experiences are sidewalks that don't have curb cuts or that turn into dirt paths or roads without notice, forcing her to turn around and go all the way back and find someone's parking garage or driveway to use. Snow is an issue when it gets cleared from the road and pushed onto the curb, blocking curb cuts, which means Tanisha can't leave her house. There is a lack of east-west buses in West Seattle so she has to go all the way north to go west, even to get to Lincoln Park, which is directly west of her. Cuts in service mean it is taking more time to get places. Tanisha would like to see better training and consistency with Metro drivers. For example, letting people who need the ramp get on first or last and demonstrating where to properly tie down a wheelchair. She'd also like more designated ADA seating, like the newer RapidRide buses have. On multiple occasions

she's had to wait for the next bus, or two, simply because both ADA spaces were occupied. A more accessible community for Tanisha would have many more ramps, clear curb cuts, more consistent bus schedules, shelters at all bus stops for rainy days and more light rail.

Image Description: A brown-skinned woman, smiling. Her brown hair falls just at her neckline and she wears a dark shirt and a gray and orange winter cap.

I often use my wheelchair in the road. I've had people yell at me that it's not safe and I understand, but they don't understand. If I get thrown off the sidewalk into traffic because there's a root or an uneven piece of the sidewalk, that is not safe.

—Tanisha, Delridge

Jay

Jay lives in Marysville and uses the bus to get around. The biggest barriers for him are the length of bus trips and the lack of sidewalks. Because of missing sidewalks and curb ramps, he prefers to bring someone with him to help him if he gets stuck. When the bus stop doesn't have a sidewalk, he needs someone to push him up because the angle of the ramp is too steep for him to get up on his own — another reason he prefers to have someone travel with him.

Image Description: A light-skinned man in a bright green manual wheelchair sits on a lift that is being extended from a bus. He is wearing a baseball cap and a purple lanyard.



An inch represents a foot if you're in a wheelchair. If you go over a bump, it's like you're going over a whole foot of a bump when you're walking regularly. When you're trying to go three blocks down the street on your side of the street, sometimes you have to go a nine-block radius to get to where you're going.

—Erin, Seattle



Image Description: Two light-skinned women sit side by side, smiling and leaning toward each other. The woman on the right wears glasses. The woman on the left sits in a powerchair.

Greg

"The sidewalks need to be updated, with tactile bumps for the crosswalks. There's maybe two or three accessible crosswalks in this city."

Greg lives in Longview and gets around walking and with paratransit. He previously lived in Gray's River, but moved to Longview to have access to paratransit. In Gray's River, the bus ran twice a day. Once, he missed the last bus and had to spend \$200 on a cab to get home. Greg's dream is for his community to have a fixed-route transit system that is accessible to him, because trying to get paratransit pickups scheduled can be difficult. He's missed

doctor's appointments before because of that. He also wishes more of the sidewalks had tactile bumps at the crossings and for more accessible places, with audible signals, to cross the street in Longview. At night, he's able to see the light colors change, but because of his light sensitivity, during the day, he has to risk crossing by just listening for traffic.

Image Description: A light-skinned man with glasses and tousled sandy blonde hair in a close up shot indoors. He wears a black scarf and a dark brown jacket.



Steph

Steph is a student in Port Angeles who relies on the bus and paratransit to get around in her powerchair. Steph says she gets around pretty good in her chair and she lives close to services she needs, like grocery stores. But her chair has gotten stuck in places that have no curb cuts; the city told her they are a low priority to add. The inconsistencies getting paratransit were confusing — she was told different things about requirements by different people. She has missed rides when drivers didn't ring her doorbell. She's found navigating between Jefferson County and Clallam County transit to be difficult. Steph used to live in Gardiner, in Jefferson County, with her mom. To catch the Clallam County transit bus into Sequim, she had to somehow cross Highway 101, which wasn't safe, so her mom helped her advocate to get cross-county paratransit service from home to the Sequim transit center. She'd like for more buses to serve Edmonds more quickly and to get a ferry to visit family on Whidbey Island. Right now it takes a whole day.

"Highway 101 is sketchy to cross. It's scary even with little to no traffic. You never know. When I have to cross it to catch the bus, I'm like, 'When do I go? When do I go?' I wish there were slow lights by the bus stop warning drivers to be aware of pedestrians."



Image Description: A light-skinned man and woman flash peace signs with their fingers as they stand next to a street. The woman sits in a purple powerchair.



Aileen

"One of the bigger barriers is that sidewalks are atrocious in many places. Sometimes they are completely nonexistent. And we're in the part of the year where there's a great deal of ice."

Image Description: A close-up of a light-skinned woman wearing a yellow head covering and heavy gold necklace.

Aileen lives in Yakima. Before COVID, she used the bus to get around, but now she and a friend will walk or hire a cab. She finds herself walking to a Safeway that's further, but the sidewalk next to the closer Safeway is in such bad condition, it makes the extra distance worth it. Aileen is low vision and has never been able to drive, but she doesn't qualify for paratransit. This is particularly hard right now in the pandemic as she's worried about taking transit with other riders. She has lived in other parts of the country with more robust transit systems. She particularly loves systems where different bus routes stop on different blocks, so as

you're waiting for a bus, you don't have to worry about getting on the wrong one. She would move to somewhere with better transit in a "heartbeat," but she lives on SSI and can't afford rent in those places. And she does love Yakima, having raised her family here and having built a community of friends. She just wishes people thought more about people in Yakima who don't have cars or can't drive — especially in this moment in the pandemic when everything has become drive-through only.

"This is a really beautiful area of the country. And I've overall liked living here despite the things that I complain about. I've also got some fantastic friends. I've gotten to do things I never would have gotten to do living in a bigger city. So you know, so on the whole, my life here is great. It could be better with better transit."

Image Description: A sidewalk ends and turns into a painted shoulder. At that point, a yellow sign with a diagram of a wheelchair user.



Lilly

"When I was walking I didn't really realize how different it was for people who have disabilities. Now that I am disabled I'm like, 'Whoa, you have to change your whole life around just to make sure that you can get into a place.'"

Lilly lives in Federal Way and uses paratransit. She would prefer to take public transit because of the long waits for paratransit, but it's not safe because there are no sidewalks or curb ramps near her home. Lilly lives in King County but all her appointments are in Tacoma and Pierce County, so she has to schedule trips on paratransit three days ahead. It's so much work and hassle that she sometimes misses her appointments. Lilly also doesn't see her friends as often as she would like. She ends up spending a lot of time home alone and she knows that is not good for her mental health. Her dream community would have ramps instead of stairs and a lot of sidewalks that all have curb cuts. She would like leaders to experience what being disabled is like for just one day so they can see how difficult transportation is.

"Transportation is hard. It's another thing that we have to think about and already have a lot of things we have to think about. Transportation should go more smoothly. We have a right to accessibility."

Analysis

Basic pedestrian infrastructure should be the foundation of any community, yet people across the state, from cities of all sizes and areas both rural and urban, all reported facing fundamentally similar barriers because of gaps and barriers in our mobility networks. The lack of an accessible network leaves disabled travelers navigating multiple hostile conditions almost every time they leave home. Many people mentioned simply avoiding travel to places they aren't already familiar with lest they discover the lack of curb cuts or sidewalks leave them unable to navigate and forgoing important trips because they are simply too challenging.

Sidewalks

"What is the biggest barrier to getting where you need to go in your community?" was the first question we asked in our interviews. Overwhelmingly, the most frequent answer was the poor condition or absence of sidewalks, followed closely by problems with curb cuts, crosswalks and intersections.

Many communities in our state have no sidewalks at all; existing sidewalks are often filled with cracks and bumps,⁵ or are incomplete, ending suddenly with no warning or accessible cues, turning into gravel and dumping people into the street. Where sidewalks do exist, cracks and uneven surfaces create barriers for people using a wheelchair or walker and are tripping hazards for Blind and low-vision people.⁶ White canes can also get stuck in uneven edges or cracks, breaking or damaging the cane or injuring the user. Inadequate, steep or missing sidewalks can also make it difficult, dangerous or impossible to get on or off a bus, especially when using the ramp. We heard again and again that an absence of sidewalks or accessible sidewalks results in people not getting out into their communities as often as they want or need to.

Sidewalks that are difficult in mild conditions become dangerous or unusable in winter snow and ice. Two things happen: first, snow gets cleared from streets and pushed onto sidewalks and curb cuts, rendering them

inaccessible.⁷ And since property owners are most often the parties responsible for clearing access, clearing is done inconsistently and can trap disabled people in their houses.

It doesn't take extreme weather to make people feel stuck in their homes: [John](#) doesn't go out at night because unlit sidewalks don't let him navigate safely. Other people told us how mis-parked shared micromobility devices,⁸ cars parked in crosswalks or on sidewalks, dumpsters and trash cans, inaccessible construction

detours,⁹ sandwich boards and sidewalk cafes¹⁰ can all create hazards and block access.

Image Description: A light-skinned woman in a powerchair looking at the gravel her chair is stuck in on the side of a road that has no sidewalk.

Previous Page: The wheels of a powerchair approaching a large bump in the sidewalk.

Next Page: A dark-haired woman in a powerchair rolls in the shoulder of an arterial road as an enormous dump truck passes in the lane to her left.



Curb Cuts/Curb Ramps

Where sidewalks do exist, curb cuts — the small ramps cut into sidewalks, typically at intersections to allow access to crosswalks — may be absent or may be too narrow or steep with large bumps or “lips” on the edge, out of compliance with current ADA standards.¹¹ This interrupts the sidewalk network, creating hostile, dangerous conditions and barriers.¹²

[Harry](#) can walk but isn’t always able to lift his legs over curbs, so curb cuts are essential for his mobility. At intersections, curb cuts are supposed to function as aids to ease street crossings, but far too often their orientation forces users into oncoming traffic, outside the bounds of the crosswalk — where drivers are more likely to expect and anticipate “pedestrians” and where people have more legal protections if they are hit by a driver. Curb cuts aren’t always visible from a distance, so the inability to rely on the presence of usable curb cuts at every intersection can result in someone approaching a corner/intersection only to find they must backtrack or risk getting stuck while attempting to navigate a substandard curb. For those who require curb cuts for mobility, a network of sidewalks without functional ramps is no network at all.

Sometimes these barriers result in choices (necessities, really) that other people may perceive as unsafe. Several people shared that they often ride on the shoulder of roads or in bike lanes because the sidewalks and curb cuts are so deteriorated that the risk of being thrown off the sidewalk is a greater safety concern than being in the road with cars. Having a complete pedestrian network is especially important on high speed, high traffic roads that lack sidewalks in lower income rural and suburban communities, which for many disabled people are the only

areas where they can afford housing. Unlike Massachusetts,¹³ which has a statewide analysis of sidewalks and crossings, Washington has only just begun to complete this analysis on state-managed roads and bridges.¹⁴

Intersections and Crosswalks

Overall, people told us they felt crossing the street often feels very dangerous. Many crossings are not consistently well-marked — and, as [Nikki](#) noted, for Blind and low-vision people, whether or not a crosswalk is marked means nothing. Intersections that lack accessible pedestrian signals (APS) that provide auditory and tactile cues, contribute to the sense of danger.¹⁵ Too often APS buttons are not physically reachable because of height, steepness of the adjacent sidewalk, or sidewalk/planter strip furniture placed at the base of signal poles. Many people mentioned that this is especially a problem in construction detours.

Traffic signals and practices that don’t account for disabled travelers are another safety concern. Right turns on red,¹⁶ for instance, create conflicts because a Blind person who can hear an audio crossing signal indicating it’s their turn steps off the curb to cross only to encounter a turning driver. This is also an issue for disabled pedestrians who may move slower than the time allocated by the traffic signal to cross a street.¹⁷ Waiting for drivers to turn further cuts into the time available to cross. Permissive left turns similarly create conflicts that are unsafe for disabled people.¹⁸

Many people we interviewed noted that bus stops are often located far from crosswalks. Additionally, they are frequently forced to take long detours instead of more direct routes to get to their destinations, either to avoid dangerous crossings or because of barriers or gaps in the sidewalk network. When intersections lack signals or accessible signals, they have to wait for traffic to clear or hope that drivers will yield. High speed arterials, one-way streets and highways are particularly challenging.

Inconsistent Tactile Markings

For low-vision and Blind people, incorrectly anticipating tactile markings can backfire. [Kat](#) fell off a curb in her powerchair because the transit agency had placed the same yellow tactile tiles to designate bus stop door openings. [Kat](#) mistook this for a ramp and rolled off the curb, injuring herself. Many transportation departments are experimenting with different treatments and markings for bike lanes or shared bike/pedestrian spaces, which are often unintelligible for Blind and low vision folks navigating with white canes or for their service animals who have not been trained on the meanings of new (and constantly varied) markings.

The Public Right of Way Guidelines published by the US Access Board provide many useful and detailed recommendations for the design and construction of tactile markings, accessible parking spots and every other facet of the pedestrian experience, but the lack of funding for sidewalks and ADA accessibility of our public spaces means that most of our infrastructure falls far short of these standards.¹⁹



Recommendations

—Elected leaders must fund the completion of our pedestrian network, including missing sidewalks, curb ramps and accessible pedestrian signals on arterial crossings.

—Local jurisdictions must create and implement standards that limit placement of furniture, street cafes, signage, garbage cans, cars and micromobility device parking to ensure the sidewalk and curb ramps remain accessible.

—Local jurisdictions must standardize tactile markings for driveways, bike lanes, shared bicycle pedestrian spaces and transit stops.

—Elected leaders should assign responsibility for repairing and maintaining sidewalks to local jurisdictions, including responsibility for keeping sidewalks clear of snow, ice and vegetation.

—Local jurisdictions should employ design and engineering techniques that delay or minimize the encroachment of roots, frost heaves and other wear to prolong the useful lifespan of sidewalks.

—Local jurisdictions must clearly define standards and ensure compliance for accessible construction detours, both for short and long-term construction projects.

—Local jurisdictions must improve signal timing for pedestrians, with shorter wait times between cycles (60-90 seconds) and more time for pedestrians to safely cross the full distance of intersections, no faster than 2.5 feet per second.

—Local jurisdictions must revoke permissive right-turn-on-red codes and strictly limit the use of “free” left turns that put vulnerable road users in the path of drivers.

—Local jurisdictions must ensure that ADA parking spots are wide enough to accommodate vans and that adequate space is left around both left and right sides of the vehicle space for people with wheelchairs to safely get in and out.



Image Description: A brown-skinned man in a manual wheelchair gestures in frustration at a crumbling sidewalk.

Transit Frequency, Connections & Schedules

Amandeep

“Some bus stops don’t have shelters and it’s hard for people to be waiting for over half an hour in the winter, especially people with a disability or a Blind person. Sometimes if you miss one bus, you have to wait two hours for the next one. It’s not a good service for people who rely on public transportation.”

Amandeep is a Blind student who lives in Lynnwood and attends Everett Community College. She gets around using the bus. One challenge is that the buses she needs don’t stop very close to campus. Another is that bus announcements aren’t loud enough, so at busy and loud stops, it’s difficult to hear if the bus is the one she needs. Amandeep finds that TransitApp is the most accurate app and has the best voice function. She’s missed buses and had long waits using other apps. In Amandeep’s ideal community, transit stops would have Braille signage consistently posted with route numbers, direction of travel and schedule details. Going to downtown Seattle would be much easier, so she could meet friends, go to meetings and go out to eat more often.



Image Description: A dark-haired woman in a denim jumpsuit and dark glasses holds a white cane while walking along a transit station sidewalk.



I had to attend a 90-minute meeting in Carnation, 20 minutes from where I live and, using the local transportation, to be picked up at home, taken to the meeting, picked up after the meeting and brought back home took seven and a half hours door to door. I had to attend those meetings but doing so took up my entire day because the buses are so limited and infrequent. In a rural area where there are so few options for mobility, transportation is life. Many people live more than five miles from the nearest store or clinic and the roads were not set up to be walkable or even bikeable in many cases. So, if the goal is to have a thriving, resilient community, start by making sure that there is safe, affordable, accessible, sustainable and convenient transit. Create a baseline of service for the community so that people can plan their lives and their work and play around it.

—Amy, North Bend



Image Description: A light-skinned blonde woman in a white shirt smiles. Behind her is a river and a grassy, wheat-colored landscape.



Image Description: A light-skinned man with a cane and a chocolate lab guide dog walks alongside a paratransit van. The driver, dressed in white and black stands in the background.

Kevin

"Transit absolutely builds communities. Before COVID we all went to the big box stores at the same time. We talk, we share stories, we share recipes, we build friendships. I refer to us as a little town, helping each other and helping our broader community. And our drivers are our mayor."

Kevin is a retired professor living in rural Mason County with his wife Becky. Kevin is Blind, as is Becky, so they depend on paratransit and some volunteer services to get around. Kevin has cancer so he needs to make frequent 45-minute trips on paratransit to Olympia for specialty care. He is active in working with nonprofits and on disability access with transportation agencies. Kevin and Becky remain very active in their community and public transit is the main way they stay connected to that community. But transit cuts have forced them to reduce how often they attend church, see friends, or enjoy the outdoors. Kevin's vision for transit-reliant people in rural communities is to increase transit service and to improve communication using GPS or other digital tools to allow riders to track where their paratransit rides or buses are so they can have more control over their time. He sees how often transit drivers function as social workers, helping riders and he would like to make training available to help drivers connect riders to resources.

Blake

"Many times, I waited up to 30 minutes for the next bus because the lift did not work, or the bus was full of passengers who would not give up their seat. I wish resources were in place for passengers like me so that we do not need to pad so much extra travel time just to get to our destinations on time."

Blake uses a power wheelchair and lives in University Place. He works for a nonprofit organization. He uses transit to get around Pierce County and the region. Blake lives near a main bus line that is within five minutes of his home and his route to the bus stop has an accessible sidewalk, accessible curb ramps and a signalized crosswalk. The biggest barrier Blake encounters is the lack of bus service in Pierce County overall. If he needs to transfer, it's challenging because most other routes run less frequently. Blake would like more frequent transit that runs from early in the morning to late night, seven days a week, and would like for buses to have room for stroller parking.



Joshua

Joshua lives in Centralia and takes the bus for transportation. He wishes the transit routes went to more places and were connected to nearby communities, like Olympia, Grand Mound and Napavine.

Olga

Olga lives in Fairwood and rides the bus. Her biggest barrier is that she has to take three buses to get to her destination. That takes time away from her that she could use for things like exercise or enjoying her family. Olga's ideal community would be just like her current community, but with more transportation options. She'd like her elected leaders to know that Fairwood needs another transit route.

Story provided by Living Well Kent.

Image Description: A light-skinned man with glasses and a fluorescent safety vest stands at a bus stop. He is smiling. Next to him is a green and yellow bus with "Lucky Eagle" on the side. Below: A light-skinned young man with glasses and short brown hair sitting inside a trolley looking outside to passing buildings. Previous Page: A young man with dark hair and glasses in a powerchair on the sidewalk in a parking lot. He faces a woman in a manual wheelchair. In the background, a person in a wheelchair navigates through the parking lot.



"I am a Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) customer and the DVR office is probably 15 minutes away from me, but to get there by bus takes an hour or more. So unless I want to take up my whole day using the bus, I just get a ride, because taking a one-hour bus ride to the DVR office just doesn't make any darn sense."
—Luke, Tacoma

I would change how transit is funded. Sales tax is very volatile and disproportionately impacts low-income people like me.

—Blake, Tacoma



Kris

“On a typical day before COVID, I would get up and catch the 7:15 a.m. bus outside my apartment, take a three-minute bus ride down to the ferry terminal, where I would switch buses to the 390. The 390 would take me out to the Poulsbo Park & Ride. At that point I would switch to a bus that would take me down to Silverdale Park & Ride. At Silverdale Park & Ride, I would then switch to another bus that would get me into Bremerton. That was my commute. It took two hours. It’s a 30- to 40-minute drive.”

Kris lives on Bainbridge Island. Her main mode of transportation is fixed route buses, though she also uses a Dial-A-Ride service since moving to Bainbridge Island. The main barrier Kris faced before COVID was that buses near her home only came during “commuter” hours, so if she wanted to go somewhere mid-day, later in the evenings, or weekends, she had to use Dial-A-Ride.

But Dial-A-Ride buses also served as peak hour fixed-route buses, so she was limited to requesting trips that finished by 3:30 p.m., so the driver could serve the fixed routes. Transit also stops running at 8 p.m., which makes evening activities difficult. Being confined to the Dial-A-Ride pick up and drop off cut down on spontaneous adventures. Such as when she takes the fixed route buses, if she wants to stay a little longer and explore an area, stop or linger over a really good meal, she can’t just catch the next bus. When using the B.I. ride or other Dial-A-Ride, that flexibility goes out the window. Having lived on Bainbridge and in Mason County, both places with a lot of water, she wishes there were more privately operated passenger-only ferries, like there used to be, which would encourage more people to drive less and reduce road congestion. Her two-hour bus trip from Bainbridge to Bremerton would be a 30-minute ferry ride. Kris wishes elected leaders would take the time to ride transit, even if they think they’re too busy, because it would give them a much better sense of what our transportation system needs.

“While raising my two children I used buses all the time to get to school, to bring them home from school, to get to doctors’ appointments, to get them to friends’ houses. Transit allowed us to participate independently in music lessons, in sports, in art, and in other activities where we didn’t have private transportation. Some of what we had to do was network for rides with friends and family and their friends. But you don’t always want to rely on others for your transportation.”

Image Description: A white woman with long white hair stands on a sidewalk at a bus stop. She is holding her white cane. Next Page: A light-skinned woman stands at a rainy bus stop with several other people. One persona holds a large umbrella open. A C-TRAN bus approaches with a sign reading “25 St. Johns.”

Analysis

There was a strong perception among those we spoke with that urban transit is better than rural transit. But the threshold for useful service frequency for mobility varies among rural and urban riders. People living in rural or outlying areas tended to characterize hourly service as good frequency, while those in larger towns were more likely to characterize 30-minute intervals as good service frequency. Residents of larger towns or cities tended to view 15-minute intervals as good frequency. In other words, rural riders don’t require the same frequency that urban riders require, but they do require a better base level of service.

When infrequency, poor scheduling and poor connections make using transit onerous, people put off or even skip necessary trips like doctor visits, and are less likely to take the kind of discretionary trips that people with easy access to transportation may take for granted, like visiting friends or family, or having a night out. This is an incredibly common barrier among those we spoke with.

Most transit agencies, especially before the decline of commute trips during the pandemic, allocate the lion’s share of service hours to traditional commute hours, weekday mornings and late afternoon/early evenings. Service is less frequent at other times, leaving people with little or no access in the early morning, midday, evenings and weekends — that is, most of the day. In many interviews, people frequently cited the lack of weekend service as a significant barrier, particularly in rural and outlying areas. People noted that not all errands, appointments and other needs can be completed during the week, especially when travel times on paltry transit schedules require budgeting considerable time for errands that, by car, would be quick. And, while most people who have car access can easily plan evening activities with friends and family, many people told us they felt very restricted from these social outings as a result of inadequate evening service.



Trips that people who can drive make without much thought can take two, three or more times longer by transit, often because of infrequent or peak-hour only scheduling, the need for multiple transfers and wait times between transfers and mismatched connections between different transit agencies and modes.

A trip from Seattle’s University District to Des Moines/SeaTac is two hours by transit, a trip that is 25 minutes by car. A trip from Leavenworth to Wenatchee is 90 minutes by transit but only 30 minutes or less by car. Longer distance trips around the state require prohibitive travel time. A large number of those we spoke with mentioned that it can take an entire day to visit family or travel to a doctor’s appointment using transit or paratransit, destinations that can be reached via short car trips. John lives in Port Townsend, a place people regularly drive to for recreation but that is difficult to reach by transit. He has to stay overnight in Seattle when attending a periodic medical clinic because he can’t get to the appointment and back to Port Townsend in the same day, adding a considerable cost to his trip.

Relatedly, planning trips beyond the immediate community creates another burden — the time and effort taken in matching up schedules and transfers and understanding different transit agency policies. A trip from Everett to Seattle during on-peak hours may require three buses and two or three hours.



Image Description: Interior of a bus with three young people seated. Outside, the sky is sunny and blue, urban areas.

Even in urban areas, a lack of direct connections or routing can force people to take long, roundabout bus trips to places relatively close by. The complexity and time required to plan trips was a common challenge cited by almost everyone who spoke with us. We write more about this in the [Specialized Transportation Services](#) section.

Infrequent transit service also requires that disabled riders often have to arrive at their destinations very early to avoid the risk they might be late. In some communities, missing one bus means a two-hour wait for the next bus. Transfers are burdensome in many different ways for disabled people. For wheelchair users, even if equipment is consistent, multiple boardings and de-boardings at transfer points eat up time. If equipment and lifts vary from bus to bus or among transit systems, that's an additional burden. For Blind riders, the wayfinding burden increases, especially when they are taking trips to unfamiliar destinations. Some Blind riders only feel comfortable using fixed-route transit if they don't have to worry about finding and transferring to a second bus. This lack of frequency, connections and routing can be particularly limiting to families traveling with young children or people

with chronic health disabilities that make extended trips more burdensome.

The constant threat of service cuts looms for disabled riders, particularly in rural areas.²⁰ Riders told us they worried about being able to get from everything to support groups to groceries to recreation, or how long those trips would take with scaled-back schedules or whether they would still be able to make transfers without prohibitive wait times. Infrequent service can compound barriers for people who use mobility devices: if ADA space is full, drivers sometimes don't stop. We detail these obstacles in [Wayfinding, Equipment & Shelter](#).

Some people told us they gave up full-time work or could not find jobs that aligned with the limitations of transit schedules and connecting transfers — people feel their job opportunity is hindered²¹ because the thinness of schedules threatens the ability to keep a job.²²

Vaughn compensates by relying on expensive ride-hails for important time-sensitive meetings like job interviews or doctor appointments, but this is

a stopgap for winter months and not sustainable for him as a regular practice because of its high cost. Read more about how inadequate transportation restricts employment opportunity in [Access to Employment](#).

When smaller communities and rural areas lack transportation connections to neighboring communities, expensive taxis or ride-hails are often the only alternative — and, because they are not universally accessible, may not actually be an option. Cobbling together rides from family and friends is sometimes possible, but it's not a first choice when people are busy or, people often told us, they do not want to be a “burden” by asking for frequent rides. When private bus service does exist,

pricing tends to be far more expensive than public buses.

Many disabled riders in smaller towns expressed the desire for their communities to be better connected to each other by transit and we heard in a number of interviews an interest in being able to more easily travel to Olympia to participate in state policy decisions. Having their communities served, or more frequently served by Sounder or someday, Amtrak or high speed rail would dramatically improve access to education, employment, healthcare and social activities.³³

Image Description: A transit van drives along a road. In the foreground is an orange bus stop shelter.

Recommendations

—Elected leaders must fund public transit agencies to expand their service areas and to increase frequency, reliability and service hours.

—Elected leaders must fund more inter-urban rail and bus service, particularly between smaller towns and beyond the population centers of King, Pierce, Kitsap & Snohomish Counties.

—Transit agencies must ensure bus stops are located adjacent to key destinations like shopping, education, medical or social services and open space/recreation.

—Transit agencies must coordinate between jurisdictions to reduce long transfer wait times, especially connecting commuter trains to bus routes and between different bus systems.



Transit Wayfinding, Equipment & Shelter

Hayley

I've often been told to just memorize where things are, but would you expect a sighted person to do that? Of course not! It would be nice if there was just a Braille number so I know what bus route it was."

Hayley is a Blind mom who lives in Tacoma with David, her husband, who is low vision, and their two kids. They live in the Fircrest neighborhood, less than a mile from where David grew up. Hayley and her family get around using a combination of public transportation and ride-hailing services. Some of the biggest barriers for Hayley are lack of sidewalks on the street she lives on and lack of accessible pedestrian signals. Without an audible signal, it's really difficult for Hayley to find the push button to request a walk signal. She also wishes there was Braille signage on the bus stop poles, so she could tell a bus stop from a utility pole. At the transit center near her house, she wishes there was Braille on all the bus stops poles, so she knows for sure she's waiting in the right spot.

"So I know this bus stop because there's a shelter over it, but that's not always the way bus stops occur. I often can't tell if it's a bus stop, or a utility pole with the same shape and same texture."

Image Description: A light-skinned woman in a puffy gray jacket walks with a young boy. She holds a cane. A large utility pole looms behind her.



Image Description: A light-skinned woman with short, dark hair and glasses sits on a bus, smiling and leaning toward a baby in a stroller next to her.

Below: A light-skinned woman stands holding a pair of walking braces alongside a Community Transit bus.

Ivanova

Ivanova is a disabled advocate and mom who lives in Tacoma. She mostly takes transit, though since the pandemic she's been relying a lot on her husband, who can drive. That means that she doesn't go anywhere during the day and often doesn't get out until the weekend. Ivanova can't wear a face mask and so when she rides transit she uses a face shield, but feels like that blocks enough of her vision that it's too difficult to see where she is and navigate safely. When riding transit, Ivanova has trouble standing and waiting at bus stops because of her arthritis. She wishes more bus stops had shelters and benches and that transit ran more than once or twice an hour. Ivanova also wishes there was more transit outside of urban areas, because she would love to live somewhere more rural, with more trees and mountains.

"Bus shelters are really important for accessibility. Not all of us can stand in the rain. It makes me feel sick and it's painful. When someone's at a stoplight in a nice little car, they're not stopped at a crosswalk in the rain. That's a different experience. And I wish they would understand that."

Leigh

"I've brought up the idea of shortening the duration for how long people using paratransit have to be at a destination. Because you don't want somebody with a disability, especially with immune issues or joint issues, waiting outside where it's cold or wet or snowy or icy and it's precarious. The feedback is, 'We'll look into it,' but nothing gets done."

Leigh lives in Mill Creek. She is partially mobile and uses crutches. She relies on paratransit for shopping and to get to work in Everett. Paratransit helps Leigh access her community and maintain her independence; she used it when she was a volunteer at PAWS. The inability to do things at the last minute and the time it takes to do any errand are both barriers she encounters using paratransit. Things that take most people 10 or 15 minutes take hours because paratransit requires booking days ahead and remaining at the destination for at least an hour. Leigh's sister lives in Bothell and can sometimes give her rides, but Leigh isn't comfortable inconveniencing people that way. Ride-hails are expensive and not all ride-hail vehicles are accessible for her. She'd like a cost-effective form of transit readily available 24 hours a day. Leigh is curious about self-driving cars but doesn't think they will be available in her lifetime.



Nick

Nick works for Lighthouse for the Blind and lives in Liberty Lake. He uses fixed-route transit most of the year, but uses paratransit in the winter because the lack of snow clearing blocks access to the sidewalk. The biggest barriers he faces using fixed-route transit are when he goes to downtown Spokane for work and has to navigate construction or other barriers on the sidewalks and the bus system stops and routes. Nick is hard of hearing and sometimes has a difficult time communicating with bus drivers about where the bus is located. This has even become more difficult with the extra barriers and masks blocking sound further. As a result, he's gotten off in the wrong place and had trouble navigating. He wishes there were better navigation options to locate bus stops. For example, Soundscapes, a Microsoft accessibility app, will tell him there's a bus stop, but not which side of the street it is on. At Spokane's downtown transit center, he wishes there were tactile markings — even just a carpet that ran along the main path through the interior of the station — so he could navigate from one end to the other without getting disoriented.



Image Description: A light-skinned man in jeans, jacket, cap and dark glasses holds a cane as he stands on a sidewalk in a subdivision.

Jim

“While the tie-down areas are supposedly reserved for people with disabilities, they are frequently occupied by people with full shopping carts, which can’t be collapsed easily, or by people with strollers, which usually have small children in them and service animals, which are usually large dogs. This leaves no room for mobility-device users. This is a design issue that affects mobility-device users, people with strollers or shopping carts and those with service animals and it needs to be addressed now.”

Jim lives in Center Park Apartments, a Low Income Public Housing (LIPH) community in the Rainier Valley. If it’s dry and not too cold, he uses his powerchair to get around and shop for groceries, visit friends and family, go to the doctor, go to the bank, go out to lunch or dinner, and other errands. But most of the time, he uses King County Metro buses or other transit buses or light-rail trains, depending on where he’s going. The biggest barrier he faces are sidewalks that are in bad repair or missing, though he knows at this point which routes to take to avoid the worst sidewalks. The bad repair of sidewalks on Rainier is where he notices this the most, between I-90 and S. McClellan St., but he notices the many other sidewalks and curb ramps that are also in bad repair. In places where curbs are too low or non-existent, bus drivers may not be able to lower the wheelchair ramp at an accessible angle. That was a problem for a long time at the bus stop next to Center Park, but it was recently improved. He wishes people were more aware that many pedestrians have disabilities and need you to not park on the sidewalk or block the curb ramp. He would also like every intersection to have curb ramps, as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA; this is now required under a Federal court order in Seattle. He also wishes there was more flexible space in all transit buses so people with wheelchairs weren’t competing with people with strollers, grocery carts or service animals for a spot on the bus.

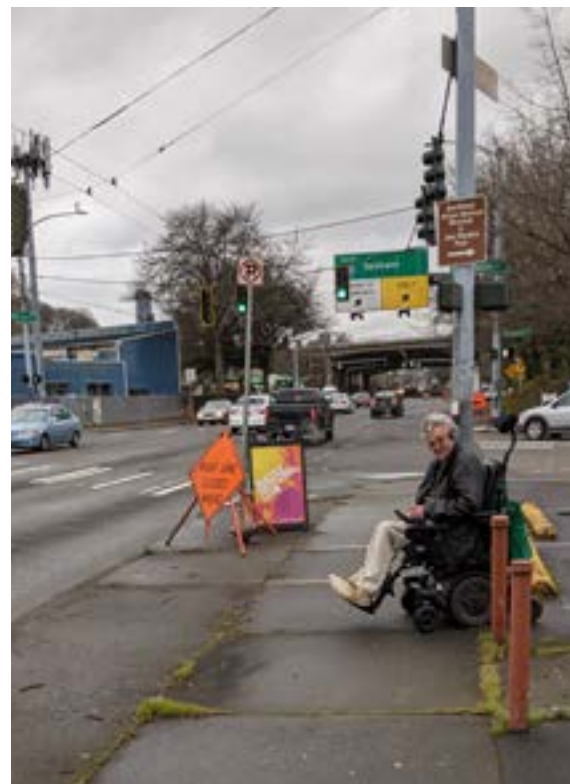


Image Description: A light-skinned older man in a powerchair on a wet sidewalk near an intersection full of heavy car traffic and a traffic sign for I-90 eastbound to Spokane. The sidewalk is cluttered with large signs.

Linda

Linda lives in Tacoma and uses the paratransit shuttle to get around. She is excited about a pilot program that provides on-demand rides. She used it recently to get a haircut and really appreciated that it came to pick her up right away, rather than having her wait an hour after her appointment, as she would have had to do for paratransit.

Image Description: A light-skinned woman with brown chin length hair and glasses. She is smiling and wearing a lanyard around her neck and a purple print shirt.



Michael

“I don’t miss the fact that I don’t drive because of my cerebral palsy. I mean, some days I wish I could drive a car, I’m not gonna kid you about that. But if you think of everybody, we got more congestion on the roads than we can handle. You put more buses on the road, you get more people on the buses. It’s kind of wild that we pit people who drive cars against people who don’t. It doesn’t seem to make much sense. We’re all in this together.”

Michael lives in Lacey and relies on the bus and Dial-A-Ride to get where he needs to go. Michael worked for the Mariners and before COVID he commuted to Seattle by bus. To be at work at 4:15 p.m., he would leave his house at 11 a.m., in case the first bus he wanted to take already had two people in wheelchairs on board. His dream is that the Sounder will someday run all the way to Olympia so he wouldn’t have to make multiple transfers or worry about whether there is room for his wheelchair. He also wishes there were more public restrooms for people who have long commutes. Because there aren’t wheelchair accessible taxis or ride-hails in Lacey, public transit and paratransit are Michael’s only options. He hopes someday they will be available 24/7, so he can go where he wants to go.



Image Description: A light-skinned man smiling wearing a white dress shirt with a tie and khaki pants sitting down in a wheelchair. Below: A light-skinned woman with grey chin-length hair and small glasses smiles.

Kristi

“I find it very hard to walk without finding someplace to plop my butt for a minute to rest. On some of the [bus] routes that I use, they may or may not have shelters, but a lot of them have taken the seating out as a way to expressly forbid homeless people from sleeping there. Well, you also take the seats out for those of us that need it. I find that that’s been a problem for me.”

Kristi lives in senior housing in Seattle’s First Hill neighborhood, where her doctor, grocery store, pharmacy and favorite pizza place are no more than three blocks away. To travel farther from home, Kristi relies on King County Metro buses; she cannot use scooters, and ride-hail services are too expensive. As she’s gotten older, Kristi needs to sit frequently because she’s found it more difficult to walk, so it’s been frustrating to find so many benches removed from bus shelters. Another barrier Kristi experiences is taking the [KC Metro route] 2 to budget-friendly Grocery Outlet. The bus stops at an uneven curb with a clump of weeds, right in front of a tree. “For anyone with a disability, it’s difficult to negotiate. Then, when you come back with a full shopping cart and you’re expected to reverse that, it’s a little tough.” Kristi loves Metro’s work to make transit free for low-income people because she knows it’s essential for everyone to go to appointments, to get shopping done, to visit family and to do all the other things people need to do in life.



Analysis

Safety, health, comfort and orientation — the simple ability to know where we are and where we are going — are compromised in the absence of appropriate seating, shelter and wayfinding and when transit vehicle design does not anticipate disabled riders. The community members we spoke with frequently shared how these widespread conditions undermined their transportation access or cut them off from their communities.

Wayfinding

Wayfinding is often inconsistent or not fully functional, leaving riders uncertain about which direction they need to go to catch their bus, where they need to go to make a transfer, or stranding them at dangerous intersections. Distinguishing a bus stop marked by a metal pole from a parking sign, if that bus stop has no Braille signage, requires Blind riders like Hayley to memorize the location of every utility pole. Audio prompts at accessible pedestrian signals and bus stop announcements in or outside the bus must be accurate, and loud and frequent enough, or available on demand, to be dependable. Audio communication that isn't loud or clear enough is particularly challenging for Blind and hard of hearing riders like [Nick](#), who also has a difficult time communicating with transit drivers or other riders, who assume he can hear and understand them. Because reliable digital wayfinding is not universally available or dependable, both fully accessible analog and digital wayfinding are essential. For more on wayfinding, see [Leveraging Technology](#).

Seating and Shelter

Those who can drive may take for granted the ability to wait out delays in extreme

weather in a secure, comfortable place, but even at main transit hubs, adequate seating and shelter from heat, cold and rain is often minimal. For many people, the lack of benches or other seating at bus stops or paratransit pick up points risks exacerbating their conditions and some chronic health conditions flare up and cause pain when riders have no other choice but to endure prolonged exposure to routine heat, cold or rain.

In rural areas some bus routes operate primarily based on flag stops, with few or no designated, signed stops. Riders must stand at a location where the driver can see them with ample time to slow and stop. Since these routes usually operate on rural roads and highways, this usually means waiting close to fast-moving traffic on shoulders, which typically lack sidewalks and are often full of loose gravel or otherwise inhospitable for mobility devices.

When these conditions force disabled riders to seek other travel options, those usually come in the form of expensive ride-hailing services, or tapping the time of friends or family to compensate for all the ways this transportation system fails them.

Equipment and Vehicles: Layout, Capacity, Flexibility

One of the most common barriers people flagged in our interviews is how frequently ADA/flexible seating space fills up, leaving riders to endure long waits for the next bus. Ensuring availability of space may require Herculean scheduling, as for Michael who, to be at work at 4:15 p.m., would leave home at 11 a.m., in case the first bus he wanted to take already had two people in wheelchairs on board. Some riders described being

stranded away from home for the evening because they weren't able to board the last bus, or the bus they were able to get on arrived too late, after their connecting bus had stopped running.

Almost all bus layouts leave parents with young children in strollers, or riders with grocery carts with no other option than using ADA space, creating unnecessary and stressful conflict between transit-reliant riders.

Many report difficulty navigating existing ADA spaces on transit. Some people noted Amtrak's narrow passageways between cars that make riding less than optimal.



Image Description: Two light-skinned women sit on the bus, one in a powerchair, the other holds a white cane.

Recommendations

These recommendations broadly apply to paratransit; we detail additional paratransit-specific recommendations in the [Specialized Transportation Services section](#).

- Transit agencies should build shelters and seating at every bus stop. Folding seats must be easily folded down or up with little physical effort. Shelter placement must not block bus ramp access in conjunction with sidewalks and curbs.
- Transit agencies should install Braille signage at all transit stops and ensure all transit has functioning audio systems to announce upcoming stops and to identify the route to riders about to board.
- Transit agencies should partner with local jurisdictions to ensure there are sidewalks, curb ramps and accessible pedestrian signals within a one-mile radius of each stop and that there is a signalized crosswalk at every stop.
- Transit agencies must build multiple elevators in elevated or underground stations, as well as ADA accessible ramps, to mitigate elevator failures and ensure prompt repair when failures occur.
- Transit agencies must install automatic doors on transit station entrances.
- Transit agencies must purchase and/or retrofit transit vehicles, including rail, to include more flexible space for those using mobility devices and to accommodate strollers, grocery carts and baggage.
- In design and procurement processes, transit agencies should coordinate across jurisdictions to reduce variation in accessibility features, providing riders with more predictability and assurance of system navigability.

Specialized Transportation Services

Kyle

"I think people, myself included, need more access to the wonderful places up here in Clallam County. And basically, there isn't access via public transportation right now. It would open up possibilities for everybody. I'm focusing on disabled people. But let's broaden that to seniors. Let's broaden it to Joe Blow. He has a car. If there's a good option other than to drive it, people are gonna jump on it. Because driving is expensive. You've got insurance, you've got car maintenance, you've got gasoline."

Kyle is a Blind disability advocate and a retiree who lives in Sequim. He worked for Clallam Transit for several years as a customer service agent and has also worked for the paratransit system. Kyle is fortunate enough to live close to the Sequim Transit Center, so he can catch the bus to Port Angeles. But for some trips he still needs to use paratransit. And he knows from his work in the transit agency that many folks live too far away from the fixed-route service to use it because the routes in Clallam County are so limited. To cut costs, paratransit service is also restricted. Riders have to re-apply to qualify and are increasingly denied. Kyle is also frustrated at the different rules between different counties — for example, dogs are allowed on Jefferson County buses, but not on Clallam ones. But underlying this all, Kyle believes the fundamental problem is that there simply isn't enough funding for transit for small communities to provide adequate transportation for disabled people and seniors and he hopes the legislature will address this need.

Anisa

"People who can drive have no idea what somebody who cannot drive goes through, especially somebody who cannot easily access public transportation. Having a car is very convenient. You don't have to check the timing on the public transportation schedules. And you don't have to wait. You don't have to figure out in non-visual ways where the bus stop is or if the bus stop changed because of construction."

Anisa lives near Northgate. Before COVID, she used the bus to get around. When



Image Description: An olive-skinned woman wearing a white shirt under a blue and white checkered blazer stands in front of some large bushes.

traveling to unfamiliar places, or when she has to change buses, Anisa prefers paratransit. If she has to go somewhere immediately, she'll take a taxi or ride-hail. If she's going farther out of town, she tries to get a ride from friends. Anisa is an immigrant and is still learning orientation and mobility skills to navigate on her own as a Blind pedestrian and transit user. It can be difficult to navigate intersections or places where there are multiple bus stops. When paratransit or ride-hail providers expect her to find them, she has a difficult time and wishes those systems and drivers had better ways to locate and connect with Blind users. The paratransit system doesn't allow drivers to communicate directly with customers, so she has to communicate through a dispatcher when trying to find her driver, which adds a lot of confusion. She really wishes she had more options to be able to get out of town and enjoy the outdoors. For example, she'd like to have transit options to the snow parks.



Image Description: A light-skinned man and a woman at a Kitsap Transit bus stop for routes 223 and 215. The woman sits in a powerchair on the shoulder of the road. The man stands just off the shoulder in a patch of gravel with a German Shepherd.

JR and Kat

Kat and JR live in Bremerton. Kat is legally Blind and uses a powerchair. JR is Blind and uses a guide dog. They get around using paratransit and the bus. JR will sometimes walk while Kat takes transit and JR takes transit and ferries to his job as a machinist in Seattle. One big barrier is that there are no sidewalks on their street or bus stops near their home. They now have to walk a mile to Walgreens to get her medication since a bus stop was recently moved farther away. Using Access, the paratransit service, requires a reservation at least 5 p.m. the day before travel and a half-hour window for pick up. The provider can also move the pickup time forward or backward by up to one hour. It's difficult for Kat to plan her day when she has so little control over her transportation. If Kat has to go farther from home and is worried she won't be able to get a ride back, she has to bring her charger with her. There is a nearby bus stop JR takes to the fast ferry

to get to work in Seattle and a nearby bus Kat can take if she needs to go to Silverdale. But doing things closer to home can actually be harder because there is only very limited Saturday service and no Sunday service. They can only use the few accessible ride-hail cars for doctors appointments — not only is the minimum \$25 charge expensive on Kat's fixed income, she is required to provide an annual letter from the doctor. For JR, it's difficult even with his guide dog to know where the bus stops are actually located at the transit station, which has resulted in Kat being injured. JR has noticed that the ORCA disabled ferry pass costs more than a standard pass and that's not accessible. He wants elected leaders to make transit more accessible for people with disabilities. Kat would like elected leaders and decision makers to consider what it is like to navigate with a disability and see how difficult and exhausting just trying to get around can be.

In Seattle, if there were more compliant Lyft drivers, I would probably utilize that. But the minute a Lyft or Uber driver sees the dog, they don't want it in the car. It's against the law, they could lose their job if they refuse my ride. But they always say I wasn't there.

—JR, Bremerton



Alco

“The bus is a wonderful mobility aid, because if you have to run errands, paratransit doesn’t work too well if you’ve got four or five places you have to go.”

Alco is a blind retiree who lives in Spokane. She’s been a transit rider since she was 16, and used the bus to visit clients when she was a case manager at Services for the Blind. She’s been taking paratransit during COVID because she is in a high-risk group, and appreciates the service, but she loves the independence the bus gives her and feels it is more flexible than paratransit when she has multiple destinations.

Image Description: A light-skinned older woman dressed in black jacket and slacks stands just off a curb in a neighborhood street, holding a white cane.

Analysis

Paratransit and other community shuttle services provide critical door-to-door service, especially for those who live too far away from fixed-route service, or who can’t navigate the transfers or wayfinding necessary to always use the bus or train. But in these interviews, people told us again and again how constrained service boundaries and policies that require advance reservations, limited stops, or long wait times for pickups make it harder to get where they need to go. The initial application process for these services can further delay and complicate access. The bureaucratic hurdles become even more taxing as users cross into different jurisdictions, creating confusion and difficulty for riders like Steph who live close to overlapping service areas or must travel between counties or other jurisdictions.

With the inconsistent network of sidewalks and bus transfers, for many in our community, paratransit provides one of the only options to reach critical services. Bus or light rail can feel overwhelming, especially when transfers are required, or the prospect of crossing multiple streets feels too dangerous. Similarly, many people told us they preferred door-to-door service when they go to unfamiliar places. For Blind users like Anisa, this is the case, although she struggles often with finding her driver and vehicle, as she’s required to communicate through dispatch and cannot reach out directly to her driver.

Image Description Next Page: Interior of a paratransit vehicle looking toward the side and front.

The inverse — that some people prefer fixed-route transit, at least for some trips — is also true. Many people told us they would prefer to walk or roll, but have to use door-to-door service because sidewalk conditions or road crossings are unsafe and inaccessible — making a direct pick up and drop off critical. Some people reported that while they preferred fixed-route transit, for independence or its reach, when winter weather like snow or ice blocks sidewalks and access points, they turn to door-to-door service. Sometimes people have access to community shuttles or paratransit because they are not served sufficiently by fixed-route schedules or service areas.

People described the lack of flexibility and the tremendous time cost required to use specialized transportation. Even simple errands can take most of the day. Riders typically must remain at their destination for a minimum time period, usually at least an hour. Oftentimes, the window for pickup times (from home) can range widely, from one hour to several and many operators tell riders to expect they will move pickup times with no notice. When this system doesn’t work, people who have family, friends or caretakers lean on those relationships to compensate. For [Andrew](#), paratransit was so unreliable that his mother would skip church so she could give him a ride to work.

The long waits at destinations before return trips can compound chronic health conditions. For example, [Liberty](#) risks further injury to her feet if she must wait, standing, at a location without seating for more than a few minutes. Most people described reservation policies that required booking a day or more ahead of time, leaving no room for last minute errands or social engagements. In some cases, service hours are limited. On Bainbridge Island, most paratransit vehicles do double-duty serving peak-hour fixed routes, limiting users’ ability to request door-to-door trips during those peak hours and like the fixed-route transit system, many paratransit options stop running in the evenings, limiting social activities at night.

Funding to increase frequent fixed-route transit service and expanded geographic coverage could reduce demand on the paratransit system. Many users described shorter wait times and more ease in scheduling during the pandemic as many users stayed home.²³ Ensuring consistent snow removal from sidewalks in winter and fixing gaps in the sidewalk network, including the installation of accessible pedestrian signals at busy intersections near fixed route transit stops could also allow more paratransit riders the option of riding fixed route service. By investing in the changes needed for more users to ride fixed transit, service could improve for those that need, or sometimes need, paratransit access.³⁴



People told us they appreciated door-to-door service and they recognize it will always have some limitations. But people inevitably have emergencies and last-minute needs — even desires — and must have a transportation service that makes some level of spontaneous service available. For more on for-hire and on-demand door-to-door transportation, see [Ride-hail Services & Taxis](#).



Recommendations

—Transit agencies should reduce barriers to qualify for paratransit. This should involve reducing paperwork, permitting applicants to self-identify as low-income and speeding up timelines for approval.

—Specialized transportation service providers should create and improve tools to better facilitate communication among riders, drivers and dispatchers and should develop ways for riders to more accurately anticipate and track the arrival of their drivers.

—Specialized transportation service providers need to increase coordination across jurisdictions to ensure greater consistency and access and to allow riders greater ease in traveling across service boundaries.

—Specialized transportation service providers should create or expand services to provide more affordable emergency and urgent trip access, 24/7. See [Ride-hail Services & Taxis](#).

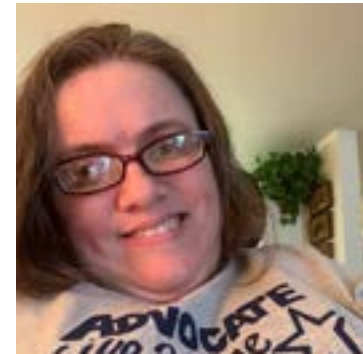
—Specialized transportation service providers should ensure policies are parent and caregiver friendly. See [The Needs of Parents & Caregivers](#).

—Elected leaders must prioritize funding for accessible pedestrian access and frequent, reliable and accessible fixed route transit to provide disabled riders other transportation options. See recommendations in [Sidewalks, Curb Cuts & Intersections](#) and [Transit Frequency, Connections & Schedules](#).

Image Description: A bus stop along a wide arterial suburban road that is placed in gravel next to a curb. There is no sidewalk, ramp, or curb cut, so the stop is completely inaccessible.

Ride-hail Services & Taxis

Jessica



“People talk all the time about getting rides [from ride-hailing companies], but people in chairs can’t do that. It’s limiting for us, people with disabilities, to get around without having to schedule exact times for everything.”

Jessica lives in Kent and relies on paratransit for transportation. Getting to places outside of King County is difficult because she has to switch between paratransit providers, for example, to try to visit friends in Tacoma.

Paratransit scheduling also makes travel difficult. It’s hard to never know exactly when you’re going to get picked up. She wishes she had more options for accessible taxi service that ran 24/7. Also, in her neighborhood, the sidewalks aren’t in great condition and the cracks and bumps and lack of curb cuts block access. Lack of sidewalk lighting makes it even more treacherous, because she can’t necessarily see the things she needs to navigate around.

Image Description: A light-skinned woman with shoulder length brown hair and round, narrow glasses. She is smiling and has dimples.

Megumi



Megumi lives on Mercer Island. Megumi gradually lost her vision as a result of retinitis pigmentosa. She began driving less frequently until her daughter convinced her to give up her license about eight years ago. Now, when her partner is away she uses ride-hailing or will take buses to downtown Seattle or Bellevue. Megumi’s biggest barrier is the long, hilly 20-minute walk to the transit center. Most of the streets on the route to the transit center do not have traffic lights or audible crossings, which is scary. Ride-hailing works well if drivers pick her up from home, but not downtown. The drivers don’t understand Megumi’s low vision and that she can’t identify the color or model of a car. She grocery shops every ten to fourteen days and stocks up so she doesn’t have to ask friends to take her more often. She doesn’t go to yoga or her Buddhist temple as often now and she visits friends less often.

Image Description: An Asian American woman with long dark hair smiles. She wears a purple shirt and a pair of glasses on a lanyard hangs around her neck.

Analysis

Overwhelmingly, our interviewees told us they would like to have affordable and accessible door-to-door service, but most could not afford to use ride-hail or taxis on a regular basis, even if they lived somewhere where the services existed or were accessible.

Because ride-hail and taxi services are not required to have universally accessible fleets, most parts of Washington lack wheelchair accessible for-hire vehicles. King County is currently Washington's only county with an accessible taxi fleet and still there are only 60 wheelchair accessible vehicles for hire,²⁴ for a total population of 2.3 million people.²⁵ We know that advocates are working with Pierce County to create an accessible taxi fleet and we are encouraged by the work of other communities, like New York City, that through years of advocacy, have won agreements to increase the number of accessible taxis.²⁶

We have heard many reports from people who use service animals that drivers will refuse rides, even though doing so is illegal, or that drivers expect passengers to be able to cross a street in order to access the vehicle, even when doing so is not possible. Several low-vision or Blind people noted that neither ride-hail nor taxi drivers have good systems to communicate with Blind users. For instance, Megumi can easily use ride-hail when being picked up at home, but in busy places there's no way for her to communicate to the driver that she needs non-visual cues or other assistance to locate the ride-hail vehicle.

Some regions have no ride-hail or taxi services. During the pandemic, places where they existed previously no longer have reliable service or the prices have risen dramatically.²⁷ Affordability is a major concern for almost everyone we spoke to. In rural communities, many surrounding areas are reachable only by taxi, which is typically prohibitively expensive. In some smaller cities, Airporter service to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is their best connection to Seattle to visit friends, go to educational classes, or even for health care appointments.

Since existing transit and paratransit services often don't accommodate urgent needs, people living on fixed incomes will sometimes find themselves with no choice but to use a ride-hail or taxi service. Many people shared stories of being forced to pay for long, expensive ride-hail trips after one late or full bus results in missing the connection to the last bus of the day, or similar experiences where emergencies forced them to turn to ride-hail or taxi trips.²⁸ One option is to expand programs like King County's taxi scripts that allow low-income disabled residents to pay less for taxi rides to other on-demand mobility providers, although analysis of a Via to Transit pilot program showed relatively low use of the last-mile ride service by disabled people.²⁹ Another opportunity is for better on-demand and accessible transportation to connect disabled people to transit, when the distance or route they would need to travel to get to the bus stop is too far or inaccessible. The Seattle Department of Transportation is currently studying the potential of such a program.³⁰

The autonomous vehicle (AV) industry has positioned its technology as one that can "solve" accessible transportation. But despite this promise, [Leigh](#) was the only person in our interviews to mention AVs. She was curious about AVs as a potential solution to some of her mobility needs, but skeptical that they would become available in her lifetime. That AVs were not top of mind for anyone we spoke with suggests closer-term and more affordable solutions should be prioritized over AV development. We are closely following the advocacy of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities for federal AV policy that is equitable and accessible.³¹

Recommendations

—Local jurisdictions must require all shared-use vehicles (including ride-hail, taxi and any future autonomous first/last-mile services) to provide wheelchair accessible vehicles.

—Local jurisdictions should require ride-hails and taxis to allow riders to set a specific location/side of the street for pickup and require drivers to be trained on how to assist Blind/DeafBlind/low-vision customers in locating the vehicle. They should also require data on pickup failures to monitor if riders with service animals are being denied rides.

—Local jurisdictions should explore partnering with port authorities and their airporter franchises to provide additional inter-city service in rural areas that lack other transportation options.

—Local jurisdictions should develop an accessible ride-hail model program for low-income disabled people to get access to on-demand and emergency transportation when paratransit or community shuttle providers cannot meet their immediate needs.

Transit Driver Training

Claudia

Claudia lives in Auburn and takes the bus, usually the 184 and 160. The biggest barriers for Claudia are that sometimes when she needs the bus to get to work, it doesn't stop because there are already a lot of people on board. Claudia doesn't speak a lot of English, so it's not always simple to ask for directions or ask the driver questions she might have. She would like elected leaders to know that the bus needs to run more frequently and that, above all, that bus stops be better equipped for hot and cold weather.

Story provided by Living Well Kent.

The more people can remain independent, the better self-esteem they have. It is ultimately less costly to the system for us to live independently and have accessible transportation to get to doctors appointments, grocery stores, visit people or go to church.

—Betty, Vancouver

Image Description: A light-skinned woman with long gray hair smiles. She stands in a driveway in a suburban neighborhood, holding a white cane. She wears a puffy gray jacket, black pants and sandals.



Betty (cont.)

Betty is Blind and lives in the Minnehaha District in Vancouver. She primarily uses paratransit, but occasionally uses fixed-route buses. Betty has previously lived in New York City and a small town in Idaho, so she's experienced using transit systems of all sizes. One barrier she currently experiences is a lack of good communication for the visually-impaired. Instead of telling her, "Take a seat," drivers could say, "There is going to be a seat on your right two rows back." Another challenge is the way service disruptions are announced, with a posted sign that isn't useful for visually impaired people.

Betty was a rehabilitation teacher for the visually impaired and saw how much better off her clients were when they could avoid being institutionalized and maintain independence, which transportation plays a critical role in supporting. If Betty could change the transportation system, paratransit would have more flexibility so she wouldn't have to budget so much time for essential errands like grocery shopping and she would make sure that sidewalks were maintained, free from bumps and cracks that make them difficult and unsafe for the visually impaired or people with walkers or wheelchairs to use.

"People are so used to going out their front door and jumping into their car and never thinking about the condition of the sidewalk, because they don't use it. Safety-wise it's critical for people to have good sidewalks."

Betty would also have people who use the system included in the planning process and ensure that agencies, staff and drivers learn the different needs that people with different disabilities have. Each disability has its own unique demands and the more that drivers and service providers know, the better the system is for riders.

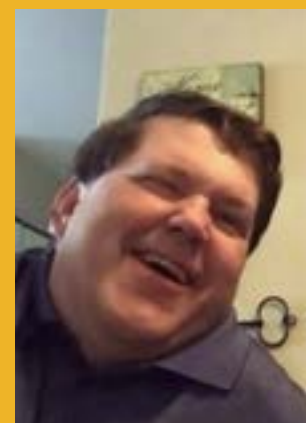


Image Description: A close up indoors shot of a light-skinned man laughing. He has short brown hair and wears a dark blue or black polo shirt.

Bill

Bill and his partner live in Lynnwood and are both nondrivers and wheelchair users. They primarily rely on fixed-route and paratransit and they chose the Pacific neighborhood because of the transit access. But with the pandemic, service has been cut, including Sundays and they've had to give up church. They own a van that caregivers can use to provide rides. Bill says the weather and inaccessible sidewalks are two of the biggest barriers he faces. He avoids traveling to areas he isn't familiar with or isn't confident will have the sidewalk and curb cuts he needs. Sometimes he'll have to go out into car traffic to get through an area. Other times, he'll be forced to turn around and go home when he reaches an inaccessible area. Bill also has difficulty when all the wheelchair places are taken on a bus. Both Bill and his partner use wheelchairs and so if they want to get on a bus together, they have to hope that no one else is using that flexible seating. Or they have to separate. Bill actually got stuck in Seattle once when there wasn't a wheelchair spot available on the last bus. Bill also wishes drivers had more training on working with people who use wheelchairs and that the schedules had more flexibility so that drivers felt less rushed when securing wheelchair users.

Analysis

Drivers are trusted and valued by riders, who largely feel they are welcoming, handle challenges well and take passenger safety seriously. This praise was common, but so was the expression of need for additional driver training and support to make riding paratransit and fixed-route systems work better for disabled riders.

Overall, drivers need more training in working with disabled riders and in communicating across languages and to people with sensory disabilities. Bill would like drivers to have a more flexible schedule so they could feel less rushed when securing wheelchair users. Tanisha asked that drivers be better trained so they consistently allow those who use mobility devices to board or disembark first or last.

Blind, hard of hearing and mobility device users all commented on the need for better communication from drivers. For example, offer specific seating directions for Blind users, as noted by Betty. Similarly, as Claudia shared, language barriers can compound challenges for riders who aren't fluent English speakers.

Some riders mentioned operational policies and driver behavior that prevented them from riding or left them stranded — from being passed up by multiple drivers on a route to the inability to use the wheelchair ramps on some buses because they are difficult for riders and drivers aren't permitted to assist with pushing. Drivers sometimes act as fare enforcers, which can create hostile conditions for riders; see the Fare Enforcement section.

Many riders recognized that drivers sometimes function as de facto social workers, managing challenging interactions with riders who experience mental health crises while using public transit; they feel drivers need training to be ready to connect riders to resources in these situations.

Image Description: A Black man in a scooter boards a Kitsap Transit paratransit van using a lift. The driver, a light-skinned woman, operates the lift.



Recommendations

—Transit agencies should review and update operational policies on how to handle full ADA spaces and should collect and publish data on how frequently riders are denied boarding because ADA space is at capacity.

—Transit agencies should invest in additional training for drivers on how to assist disabled riders with wayfinding and communication, boardings and de-boardings and proper mobility device securement.

Fare Enforcement

Abby

"In 2019, when I was riding on a TriMet train in Portland, a fare enforcer asked me to show him my ticket purchase. After showing proof of my ticket, the inspector insistently asked me for an Honor Citizen card. At that time, I did not know what the Honor Citizen card was (later I learned that the Honor Citizen card offers reduced fare to individuals with disabilities, low-income people and seniors). I told the inspector that I did not have an Honor Citizen card and I did not know what an Honor Citizen card was, but the fare enforcer decided to continue stressing me out by asking me. I was sitting down but I was holding my white cane in front of me. I am sure he knew that I am Blind. I was feeling very nervous and scared during the interaction because the enforcer's tone of voice felt very aggressive to me. Since this incident happened, I feel unsafe when riding the TriMet train. Especially when I am riding by myself. It causes me anxiety. Whenever I hear a fare inspector coming on the board, my body shakes, and I feel pain in my stomach."

Abby is a recent graduate of Washington State University Vancouver. She lives in a low-income housing apartment complex and gets around on public transit but sometimes uses ride-hail services. The two closest bus stops from her home are at least a 10-minute walk. Some of the biggest barriers for Abby are low bus frequency and the lack of bus stops. When she was a student, her trip to school took three buses and over two hours. Abby grew up in Ridgefield, where she was unable to travel independently because there is no bus service there. She would like to see more rural public transportation in places like her hometown, and more bus stops with better frequency, especially in low-income communities. She would like wider, more accessible sidewalks for wheelchair users and Blind people like her so that she could more easily get around by walking.



Image Description: An African American young woman in black pants and a puffy red jacket holding a white cane in her right hand stands at a bus stop shelter. In her left hand she holds a closed up red and white umbrella.

Mitchell

"I've traveled the bus eight years on Intercity Transit. It's easier to get on and off [now that it's fare free]."

Mitchell lives in Lacey and uses fixed-route and paratransit service. In January 2020, the transit system in Olympia, Washington, Intercity Transit, went entirely fare-free. Mitchell not only appreciates the ease of access because he doesn't have to struggle to pull out fare or a pass, he also appreciates the lack of conflict. He's had the police called before when he didn't have the right type of transit pass using the Pierce County transit system and using the transit system in Los Angeles. The removal of the fare box also creates more space at the front of the bus, which makes it easier to navigate on and off.

Mitchell hopes Intercity Transit remains fare-free so that everyone can get where they need to go, whether they can afford fare or not. And he hopes that other transit systems follow the lead of Intercity Transit and go fare-free. Mitchell also wishes there were better evening transit and paratransit services, so that people could get home from work at six or seven. Mitchell suggests that instead of investing in new routes, transit companies should increase frequency on existing routes that currently run only once an hour — he thinks more people would ride if they ran every 30 minutes.

Image Description: A close up of a light-skinned man wearing a black t-shirt that reads "Triple Threat" in large white block letters. He is bald and smiles slightly and he sits in a powerchair. Behind him are trees and shrubs.



Image Description: A young light-skinned man in a powerchair rolls across pavement in front of a shop window. He wears a white baseball cap. A light brown service dog on a red leash accompanies him.

Matt

"Public transportation is obviously a good thing. But it is stressful. It might be a good idea to loosen up the restrictions. Sometimes people are having a bad day and if they are short a dollar, just try to make it work instead of telling them they have to get off the bus."

Matt lives in Puyallup. He uses a power wheelchair in an accessible van driven by his mother. When he goes out on his own, the lack of sidewalks in many places can be a barrier. He has to pay very close attention. He used to take the bus, but it takes too long to get to the places he needs to go and getting turned away for lack of room was a pretty frequent occurrence. He once tried taking the bus to Southcenter Mall, but it was crowded and took so

long to get there that he couldn't take his time because he needed to get a bus home. When the bus did come, a man in the ADA space would not move, so Matt had to wait for the next bus. Paratransit shuttles are a last resort because the policies are too restrictive to work for him. There are no accessible taxis in Puyallup. Matt knows there will come a time when he will need to rely on public transit and he's not looking forward to it. He would prefer to have more options for door-to-door services. Matt would like leaders to know that public transit is a good thing, but it is unnecessarily stressful for riders. Policies should be less strict, so that people aren't turned away for lack of fare. It would be faster to just let people on, too, instead of delaying riders. He has seen a mom with a young child waiting at a bus stop alongside fast, dangerous traffic be refused boarding for not having full fare.

"I'm 28 and I like to have a good time and do 28-year-old things. But sometimes my mom doesn't want to drive me, which is understandable. But it can be difficult."

Analysis

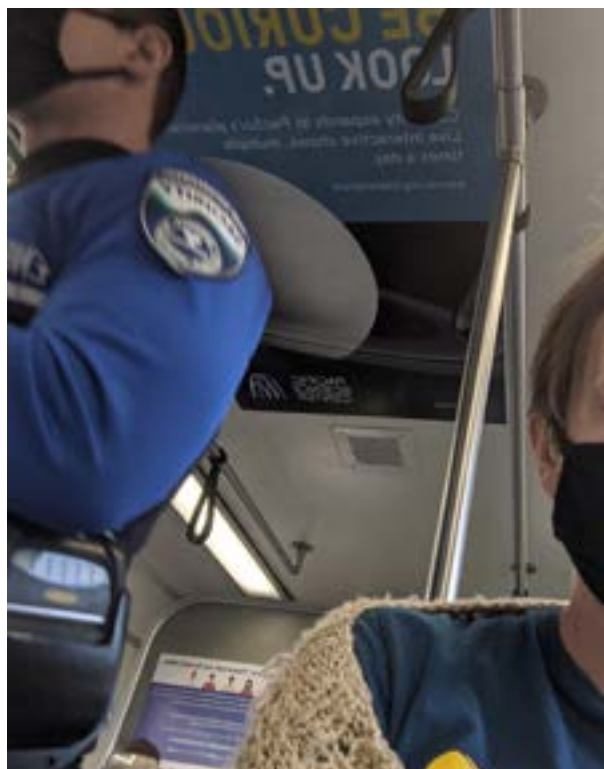
The role of transit agencies is to move people, not to punish or police them. Among the barriers presented by policy rather than physical infrastructure, none are less predictable and more foreboding than encountering fare enforcement officers.

We know that BIPOC communities face disproportionate policing and use of force.³² And across the wider culture we are finally starting to recognize the real psychological and physical violence that people face. This reality must be fully recognized and addressed in how our transportation systems operate.

Two years after her encounter with a TriMet fare enforcement officer, Abby still feels anxious and fearful, anticipating another aggressive encounter. Like many front-line public employees, fare enforcement officers are granted some level of discretion in their interpretation of their duties. This freedom, albeit necessary in any role with heavy citizen interaction, allows individual biases against Black and Brown communities to become legitimized through the court system.

Sometimes, transit drivers are the agents of enforcement, as Matt has observed when riding buses. In both Abby and Matt's stories, nothing is gained from these acts of fare policing, while elemental personal security is lost. Abby is left anxious whenever she rides TriMet, which she relies on for some of her trips, and a mother with her young child are left stranded on the side of an arterial road as fast, heavy traffic passes them by.

While transit fare may seem trivial to middle class or wealthy residents, for low-income transit users, transit fare may be unaffordable and even when low-income fare discount programs exist, these programs may be difficult to qualify for or



require documentation or proof of identity/citizenship that transit users most in need of the programs don't have access to.³³ Many transit agencies like Ben Franklin Transit in the Tri Cities went, and have remained, fare free. Others like Island Transit and Intercity Transit went fare free even before COVID. For smaller systems, the cost of collecting fares may exceed the cost of installing needed upgrades to fare collection systems. Seventy to eighty percent of the cost of fares on larger transit systems, like King County's, come from revenue other than fares.

Many advocates both in Washington state and nationally are arguing that zero-fare transit is the path forward, not only to reduce racist policing and involvement in the criminal justice system, but to also encourage more people to use transit for its public health and environmental benefits.³⁴ Intercity Transit saw an increase of 60,000 additional trips in their first month of zero-fare service, demonstrating that removing fares creates an incentive for more riders to use the bus.³⁵ And for people for whom that fare was a significant barrier, Intercity Transit's move toward zero fares suddenly made it much more

possible to get to critical appointments and services.³⁶

In addition to threatening and potentially violent encounters with transit agency staff and police, receiving a criminal citation for lack of proof of payment can cause significant harm.³⁷ A \$200 ticket issued to a person already struggling to pay a \$2.75 fare will almost inevitably result in compounding court fees and fines. Additionally, a criminal summons often requires traveling to court, arranging transportation, finding childcare or taking time off of work. In Washington state, King County Metro has tried to minimize

criminalization of fare evasion,³⁸ and now Sound Transit has the option to follow a similar path to ensure that fare evasion cases don't end up in court.³⁹

For additional resources, research and history of policing and transportation, the work of the Transportation Equity Caucus, Charles T. Brown of Equitable Cities and Dr. Destiny Thomas of the Threivance Group, offer a foundation.⁴⁰

Image Description Previous Page: A light-skinned fare enforcement officer in uniform and wearing a black face mask stands in a light rail car.
This Page: A brown-skinned man holding a white cane stands next to fast moving traffic.



Recommendations

—Elected leaders must decriminalize fare evasion to minimize the harm experienced by those unable to provide proof of payment.

—Elected leaders must sustainably fund public transit so that transit agencies can focus on providing reliable, accessible service rather than chasing revenue through fare collection.

—Transit agencies must ensure that staff, whatever their roles, have a deep understanding of the communities they serve and staff from these communities. And transit agencies must train agency staff to appropriately assist BIPOC, immigrant and disabled riders.

—Transit agencies should explicitly discourage drivers from fare policing. Boarding denials should be demonstrably based on passenger and driver safety.

—Transit agencies should coordinate farebox policies across different jurisdictions to reduce confusion and conflict.

The Needs of Parents & Caregivers

Sarahbeth



"Paratransit is not accessible to parents. You must carry and install your own car seat and sometimes wait up to an hour for a pick up with a kid who is uncooperative or overwhelmed and tired. It is often unsafe to install a car seat onto the paratransit buses."

Sarahbeth is a disabled mom who lives in Bellingham. She used fixed-route transit for years and years, but as her mobility decreased with her disability, she started to use paratransit. However, with her young kids, Sarahbeth really struggled. The paratransit provider would only allow her to bring one child with her and when she tried to bring her youngest, who was in a rear-facing infant car seat, they were unable to properly secure it in the bus, nor was the transit provider able to modify the seats so that it could be securely attached. As her child got older, Sarahbeth was unable to physically carry the larger bucket seat style car seat required. She wishes that paratransit providers took into consideration the needs of parents and caregivers — kids of disabled parents need to go places, too. Providing some vehicles

that accommodate infant car seats, or with built-in bucket-style car seats (like some school buses), would help disabled parents to get where they need to go. Sarahbeth has had to purchase a vehicle to be able to get around with her children and she knows other moms in Bellingham who are essentially housebound because paratransit doesn't meet their needs as parents.

Image Description: An overhead shot of a light-skinned dark-haired woman adjusting the straps of a child in a car seat in a paratransit van.

The bus administrators insisted they only had to accommodate me but not my child. I feel this is a sexist [loop]hole in law and policy and it purposely keeps disabled parents from transporting their children.

—Sarahbeth, Bellingham

Nancy



Nancy lives on the Wishkah River north of Aberdeen with her two adult sons, who are disabled. Nancy is losing her vision and no longer drives. They all rely on Grays Harbor Transit paratransit. They live on the edge of the service boundary and worry that if funding was cut they would lose reliable transportation access. There is a service that provides rides to medical appointments, but Nancy can't use that because she can't bring her sons with her and she cannot leave them home alone.

Image Description: A light-skinned older woman with long gray hair stands and leans down, smiling, toward a light-skinned young man sitting in a chair. Behind them stands another light-skinned young man, smiling.

Liberty

Liberty is a single mom of two daughters living in Lacey. She has Charcot's disease, which prevents her from standing or walking more than a few feet at a time. She uses the bus and paratransit.

"I homeschool my kids and there are fantastic beach naturalist programs on the coast. It's a great educational opportunity. But there is no way to get there. There is not even any way to get to Priest Point Park in our area, transit doesn't get you there."

Nikki



Image Description: A close up of a light-skinned young woman with long brown hair, smiling.

"As a mom you want to give your kids everything in the world. But there's so many things we've missed because our public transit isn't frequent or accessible. I missed two of my older daughter's high school choir concerts, which is devastating."

Nikki is a legally Blind mom of two daughters living in Longview with her husband, who is also Blind. They primarily use paratransit to get around and some transit. Buses stop running at 7 p.m. and paratransit isn't available past 6:30 p.m., making it difficult for her daughters when they participate in school activities.

Analysis

People often think of the needs of families with disabled children, but not parents that are disabled, and that is acutely reflected in their transit experience. Parents with disabilities (in our interviews, all mothers) experience unique barriers and challenges with transportation access. The same restrictions on service, schedules, lack of frequency and equipment that doesn't fully meet needs are compounded for a parent who must simultaneously provide supervision and attention to their children while navigating transit that is only quasi-accessible.

Paratransit services are particularly constraining. Even if a service permits children, if paratransit vehicles aren't outfitted with child restraint systems that meet State or Federal law, they may become de facto inaccessible for a disabled parent. This was the case for Sarahbeth, who felt she had no choice but to get a car after finding the hurdles to relying on paratransit with two young children were too great. Disabled adult children may also require supervision and policies that restrict ridership may further constrain transportation access to services, as for Nancy.

Constrained availability of reliable, accessible transit can extract an emotional toll. Parents, as Nikki and Liberty share, may not be able to fully offer their children the social, recreational and educational opportunities they would like to. They may find themselves substantially restricted from participating in their children's lives, developments and achievements — something many non-disabled parents may take for granted. Family outings are restricted when evening and weekend service is limited or non-existent, or doesn't reach common destinations like parks, beaches or community hubs.



Image Description: Two adults with their backs to the camera lean over a car seat while trying to secure it in a paratransit vehicle.

Recommendations

—Specialized transportation service providers must purchase vehicles that accommodate infant car seats and should provide car seats for larger children. The same accessibility requirements should apply to publicly funded last-mile transit providers, like Via to Transit and other publicly licensed ride-hail and taxi service providers.

—Specialized transportation service providers should allow parents and caregivers to travel with their children and other family members.

—See additional recommendations in [Transit Frequency, Connections & Schedules](#) and [Transit Wayfinding, Equipment & Shelter](#).

Leveraging Technology

Reg

“There aren't always safe places to wait. Even in 10-degree weather, you can't go into the store and there's not even a shelter. It's just another part of the overall transportation story that things have gotten harder instead of easier.”

Reg is a Blind assistive technology specialist at the Washington State Department of Services for the Blind in Yakima, where he and his wife live. He gets around using paratransit. He describes his work as his dream job, helping people get jobs and the right computer equipment. Reg and his clients depend on reliable public transportation to do and keep their jobs, because many of them cannot afford a car or cabs. And if bus schedules don't align perfectly with work schedules, that's a problem. He knows people who have lost jobs because they aren't able to drive. Transit service doesn't run after 6 p.m., so Reg can't go anywhere at night, for instance, to practice with the band he plays in. Reg would like to see bus service run earlier and later, with free service like Olympia adopted recently and technologies in use elsewhere, like fillable monthly passes so people don't have to carry cash and use tickets,

“A lot of people [who can't drive] live on their own and don't have a way to be a part of the community. I hope that they can find a fair and equitable way to fund these services because there are a lot of people that need them.”



Image Description: A man with medium-long wavy salt and pepper hair wearing dark glasses and a black Disability Mobility Initiative t-shirt stands on a sidewalk across the street from a light blue house on a sunny day. He holds a white cane in his right hand.

“Could you live your life without having to pre-schedule everything a day ahead? My guess is, it would be quite a shock to you. You ran out of milk and have to go down to the store? Okay, well, you'll have to wait till tomorrow.

“Before I retired I had to be in Cheney four hours a day, to teach my classes, do office hours and so on. When I started relying on public transportation and paratransit, that four hours would sometimes be thirteen or fourteen hours just because of transportation issues. That's ridiculous and shows an utter disregard for the value of my time.”

—Brian, Spokane

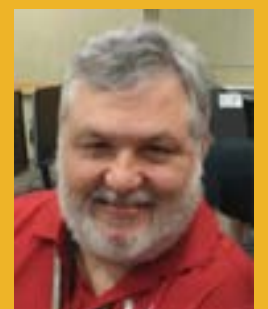


Image Description: A light-skinned older man with salt-and-pepper hair with a short beard and mustache, smiling.

Brian (cont.)

Brian is a retired senior lecturer who lives in Spokane. He was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when he was fifty. He gets around using paratransit, transit and a van that accommodates his motorized wheelchair. His biggest barriers to getting where he needs to go are a lack of accessible doorways, curb cuts and sidewalks with such large cracks or bumps that he can't navigate them. He prefers fixed route transit, but, when it snows, he can't get to buses. If ride-hails were required to follow ADA guidelines he would just use those. For Brian, an accessible community would be one that really embraces universal design. He finds Las Vegas, NV to be incredibly ADA friendly in many ways, with curb cuts everywhere and plenty of ramps and elevators. In addition to funding more vans and drivers, Brian thinks that paratransit could operate with more flexibility, such as using smaller vans for people who don't need lifts, or offering some market-rate trips like a ride-hailing service, with revenue going to transit agencies. Technology could be leveraged to make paratransit more convenient for users.

Analysis

Across the barriers we identified, we see opportunities to better leverage technology to provide accessible route planning, wayfinding and transit or ride hail access. One large area of need is more detailed and more accurate routing options for disabled pedestrians and transit users. We are encouraged by the accessible mapping research and development being done at the University of Washington's Taskar Center for Accessible Technology by Dr. Anat Caspi and her team.⁴¹

From easily communicating with drivers, to simplifying the reservation process, to getting accurate and timely information about detours and schedule changes, smartphone technology has the potential to reduce barriers for disabled nondrivers. However, smartphones and data plans are too expensive for many nondrivers and those with language barriers, intellectual disabilities, or discomfort with technology may be unable to use these tools. Even for those who regularly rely on smartphone technology, there are times a battery dies, a cell phone gets lost, or the app crashes. Therefore, like any accessibility or resilience planning, it is critical to provide this information in multiple formats, both digital and analog.

Recommendations

—Local jurisdictions should partner with researchers and developers to include accessible walking and rolling routes that allow users to plan around curb ramps, accessible pedestrian signals and hills and slopes.

—Transit agencies should improve digital communication to help riders track paratransit and bus arrivals and other real-time information, including current reroutes and other service changes.

—See additional recommendations in [Access to Employment](#).

Crisis Response & Resilience

Abby

"My situation during the heatwave was that if I had accessible transportation, I could [have gone] to the store to pick up the things I needed or gone somewhere cooler when my apartment was very hot. I have to walk very far away to catch a bus to go to the store or anywhere. If we had accessible transportation, such as a shuttle bus service that we could call and reserve within the hour or even same-day service, I would have used that. I wish we had an emergency vehicle or something to reserve the same day, because not everyone can afford to take a Lyft or an Uber all the time."

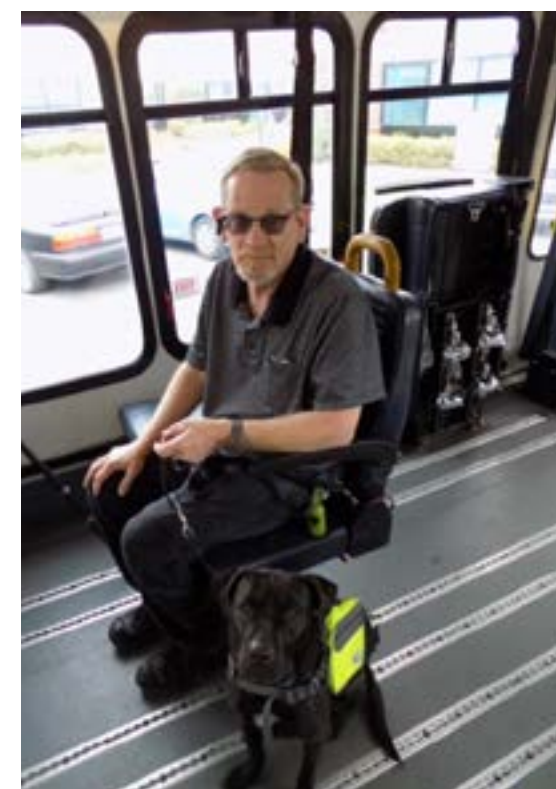


Image Description: An older man with light skin wearing dark-tinted glasses sitting down in a public transit bus next to Bull Mastiff mix, a Seizure Response dog.

Harry

"I have a very serious seizure disorder and the heat puts stress on my body, which can cause more seizures. The seizures I have are compulsive. The best way to describe them is that my whole body is out of control and in convulsions for up to an hour at a time. Every day during extreme weather I spend the entire day in more fear knowing that the chances of my having a seizure have increased tenfold. Also, public transportation can shut down during extreme weather. Usually there are fewer buses available and Portland shuts down the entire Max train system. That puts a huge amount of pressure on those of us who rely on it for simple tasks, let alone major tasks such as going to the doctor or getting to work. Suddenly, as people with disabilities, we have added pressures!"



I live in an apartment in a duplex. So we had a portable AC in our bedroom. We hunkered down in there with the dog. It was definitely cooler in there, but the portable AC was working so hard all four days...I am glad I did not have to stand outside for a bus in that heat. I almost did on the way home from Church on Sunday and it was 100 degrees at noon. I would have had to take two buses and walk a half mile to the first bus and a half mile from the second bus to my apartment.

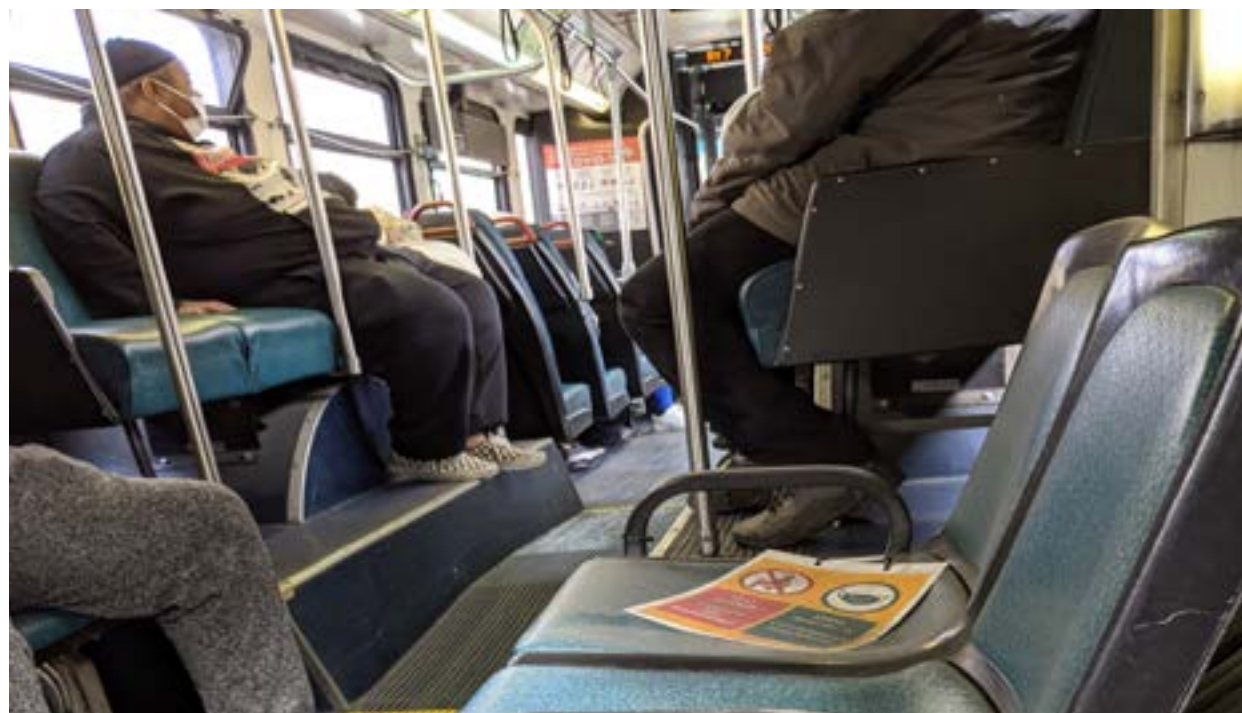
—Merribeth, Vancouver



Jo Ann

"I use the Transportation Assistance Program (TAP) in Snohomish County through Homage Senior Services. They are wonderful with very personable, caring and professional drivers. It is very easy to make reservations and they work very hard to make my trips a success. They service one area of Snohomish County. Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART) covers the other part of Snohomish County. If I need to go to another part of the county I must transfer. If I want to go to my neurologist at Evergreen Hospital, I would have to transfer to DART and then the King County system. It would take approximately three hours each way. Before COVID, the volunteer driver program at Homage Senior Services was vital to my independence as they would travel into King County. I am very fortunate we have these many services to choose from. My wish would be that they would work together more closely and without as many transfer issues."

Image Description: Interior photo of an articulated bus about halfway down the aisle. Several people occupy seats while several other seats have closed signs advising riders to keep social distance on board.



Joy

"I love it here and I have a lot of friends. I have subsidized rent here and I wouldn't have that anywhere else."

Joy is a retired teacher and news producer who lives on Lopez Island. She needs to travel off the island for frequent medical treatment to prevent further vision loss, but since the pandemic started, the county transportation provider she relied on to get off the island is no longer able to provide rides. So, Joy has to hire someone to drive her. It's not only a stretch for her fixed income, she is also unable to bring her mobility scooter with her because the person she hires to drive her can't fit the scooter in their vehicle. Without her mobility scooter, Joy has to have someone push her in a wheelchair, which limits her independence. Joy loves living on Lopez because it's where her friends and community are and she loves how the senior center provides wonderful support, from rides to heating assistance. She looks forward to the day when she's able to use the community transit provider again to get to medical appointments with her mobility scooter.

Analysis

The COVID pandemic exposed the weaknesses of many of our systems with how easily they broke down in the prolonged crisis. Transit is no exception. Accepting that many sacrifices are demanded in crises, we should also acknowledge that such sacrifices should not fall most heavily on people whose need is greatest.

Many people reported that during the pandemic, specialized transportation services were and remain available only for medical appointments. Service reductions meant even these could be difficult to secure. Many programs that relied on volunteer drivers stopped service entirely because many of the volunteer drivers were from high-risk populations. This forced many people to use ride-hail or otherwise hire drivers to get to medical appointments, like Joy, which was a financial hit on her fixed income. [Colin](#) reports that with current service suspensions, the nearest bus stop now is a two-hour walk on roads that have no sidewalks. Around the state, people reported service reductions that forced them to rely on friends, family or simply forgo many trips.⁴²

And it's not just reductions that reveal the weakness of existing transit service. In [Wayfinding, Equipment and Shelter](#), we recommend developing fully accessible and redundant wayfinding and communication tools. For riders like [Nick](#) who are hard of hearing, masks block what sound he can usually hear, resulting in his disembarking at the wrong stop. Having accessible communication tools in place would have allowed riders like him to navigate with confidence and for transit agencies to communicate about service levels with disabled riders.

By assuming everyone can choose to drive, emergency response plans leave many people out. As [Aileen](#) reported, drive-through-only COVID testing or vaccine sites had no plans for how nondrivers could access these critical services.⁴³ Many restaurants also chose to switch to drive-through-only service, sometimes banning pedestrians or people on bikes or scooters from accessing the drive-up windows.⁴⁴ Doctors and dentists required patients to wait to be seen in their vehicles, forgetting that some people didn't have that option. A quarter of our state's population is unable to drive. It's unacceptable for our needs to be completely overlooked and it does not bode well for future crises.

As we drafted this report, the Pacific Northwest experienced its most severe heat wave in modern times and, just on its heels, our governor declared a state of emergency in response to wildfires that threatened communities in Central Washington. We know that crises of all kinds hit vulnerable people the hardest. Climate impacts will make mobility even more critical for us and extreme conditions should now be expected, planned for and mitigated.⁴⁵ Whether it is escaping an un-air-conditioned apartment on a third consecutive day of record heat for a couple of hours by riding an air-conditioned bus or evacuating as a wildfire encroaches, transit access and service will be even more crucial for disabled people.⁴⁶

And while transit ridership continues to rebound after its pandemic-induced drop, there is the real risk that without new revenue sources, transit agencies will be forced to make cuts to transit and paratransit services.⁴⁷ Especially for those in rural and exurban areas, who eke out subsistence-level mobility from threadbare service, such cuts would have dire consequences. Instead of continuing to underfund public transit, we have an even larger imperative to expand transit service, given its tremendous potential to offset carbon emissions.

Recommendations

—Agency staff must plan for the needs of nondrivers and disabled community members in emergencies by including us in the decision-making process.

—Agency staff must plan for operational resilience, including design and procurement of equipment that can withstand severe weather extremes and communication strategies to inform riders when routes or procedures change in an emergency.

—Community organizations that provide volunteer transportation must plan for resilience, understanding that operating models that skew toward overreliance on volunteer drivers can leave the people they serve vulnerable when those drivers are not available.

—Elected leaders must recognize public transit's central role in climate mitigation and prioritize its funding and expansion with urgency.

Image Description: A two-lane rural road lined with trees on both sides, no shoulder and only a narrow margin of grass. In the foreground a yellow traffic sign reads "Pedestrians on Shoulder." In the background there is a 35 mph speed limit sign.



A Tough Trade-Off: Housing Affordability or Transportation Access?

Vaughn

"More affordability means moving further out. Moving further out means more limited transportation."

Vaughn is a Blind Legal Studies Master's degree graduate who currently lives in Vancouver. Most of Vaughn's routine errands, such as a trip to the bank or grocery store, are within a 20-40 minute walk. However, with infrequent bus schedules and limited routes, some of his trips can take upwards of three hours. As the winter months roll around or when he has time-sensitive meetings, like a doctor's appointment or a job interview, he finds himself relying on expensive ride-sharing apps. Vaughn finds that accessibility and affordability often compete. He'd prefer to live somewhere with better transit, but housing is too expensive. Frequent, affordable, and diverse transit would let Vaughn volunteer, contribute to the local economy, exercise, and gain meaningful employment.

"My message to the representatives in Olympia is to think about what you're taking away from the disabled population, the low-income population, or even those who may not be comfortable driving a car. You're taking away employment opportunities. You're taking away the ability for us to stimulate the economy by spending. You're taking away health benefits by limiting where we can go to exercise."

Image Description: A light-skinned, early 30s man in jeans and jeans jacket with brown hair and a moustache sits on a bus. A black lab guide dog lays under his seat and pokes its head out between the man's legs.



Donovan

"I moved to Lakewood from Bremerton two years ago. Transit in Bremerton was more convenient than here because the town wasn't so spread out. But over here I have Section 8 housing, so it's more affordable. It was more a choice about housing than transportation."

Donovan has a brain injury and lives in Lakewood. He gets around by bus and he's very comfortable doing so — it gives him independence and mobility. Donovan does not use paratransit because he doesn't qualify for Pierce County paratransit services. He is able to attend brain injury support groups in Bremerton, Puyallup and Tacoma using transit. But, service cuts have made it harder and less convenient to get around. Donovan no longer goes to movies and can only plan on doing one thing every day because it takes so long to get to his destination and back. One example is that the bus to the grocery store is right across the street from the store, but only comes twice an hour. There's no place on the bus to put his groceries. When he gets off, he has to walk two blocks and cross the street to get to his apartment, which is not easy when carrying his groceries. Donovan would like bus stops to be located closer to where he needs to go, with more frequent service and more routes going to more places and more shelters and benches at bus stops for when he has long waits or it's raining.



I don't think elected leaders really understand what it's like to try to use a bus that only runs once an hour to go where you need to go. You've got to wait around for it or you have to decide to do something else. Spend money on transit so we don't have to wait an hour to get around. We need a transit system that is convenient to use.

—Donovan, Lakewood

Image Description: A light-skinned older man with gray and white hair and a medium bushy beard and glasses smiles.



Bridget

Bridget is a visually-impaired resident of Longview who is working to become an early childhood educator. Her disability income is not enough for her to live on her own, so she lives with her parents, five miles outside city limits, with no access to public transit. Bridget has difficulty planning anything because she depends on her parents and their schedules. If she had better transportation she would see her doctor more often, instead of letting some appointments slide.

Image Description: A light-skinned smiling woman with dark hair holds a cane while standing next to a life-size white Pokemon figure. Below: A group of people cross a highway off-ramp in the rain. Many are wearing neon. In the center, a man in a powerchair, and behind him, a person with a white cane.



Micah

"Just going from the University District where I currently live to Tyee High School in SeaTac, where I used to live, would take me almost two and a half hours with a combination of two buses, light rail and walking a mile."

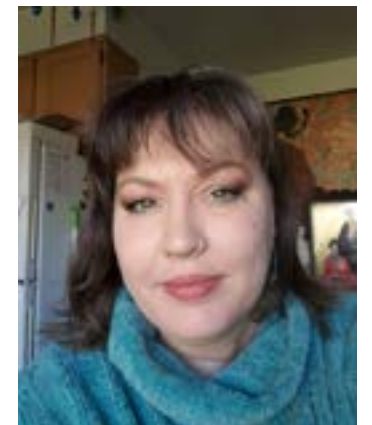


Micah moved from where he grew up in SeaTac/Kent to Seattle and finds the University District is much more accessible for him. But in order to afford to live in this area with its good sidewalks and frequent transit, he has four housemates and has had to share a room with a roommate. The biggest barriers he sees have to do with finances, seeing people having to move farther from the city to afford living and those places don't have good transportation or other resources.

Image Description: A young light-skinned man smiles. He wears a purple tank top. In the background is a table with personal belongings and a wall with several framed documents.

Harley

"My mom can't live alone. And so I am scurrying to find a home so she can move in with us. And every time I look at a listing, I have to pull up the paratransit map. And so every time I look at a listing, it's like, okay, what's the address? Then I have to google the address, then I have to compare it to the paratransit map to see, which day of the week does it have service? Is it Monday through Saturday, daytime service only? Is it Monday through Sunday with evening service? Or does it fall into one of the other categories where it's only Monday and Tuesday or Tuesday and Thursday? I can't live just anywhere."



Harley is a wheelchair user and advocate for people with disabilities who lives in Bellingham. Her biggest transportation barrier is the sidewalks, when they're missing curb cuts. She also finds it frustrating that fixed route transit buses only have spots for two wheelchairs. There are a lot of folks in the community who use that space. Harley has also noticed that the doorways and passageways on Amtrak are very narrow, making it difficult if not inaccessible for wheelchair users and she wishes more buildings generally had push-button doors for accessibility. She is also impacted by where transit and paratransit can go. She tried moving to Orting to be closer to her grandkids, but had to move back to Bellingham because there was no bus service there.

"There is not a single wheelchair-accessible taxi in my county. Not even the limo service has a wheelchair accessible vehicle. If there's an emergency, I won't be able to get to the hospital to take care of my loved one."

Image Description: A fair lady with deep brown hair wearing a turquoise turtleneck.



Chris

"[Finding housing] can be a struggle to figure out — can I walk to a grocery store if I need to, or is there a bus that can take me without having to transfer five times?"

Chris lives in Clark County, very close to Vancouver. She has been legally Blind since birth and her vision continues to steadily decrease over time; she expects to be completely Blind eventually. She depends on fixed-route buses, paratransit and walking for mobility. Chris's biggest barrier to getting around her community is that the area near her home has very few sidewalks and the sidewalks that do exist are in terrible condition. There's also a lack of audible crosswalk signals, which is frustrating.

It would be easier for Chris to get around if the nearby bus routes ran more often. Some of C-TRAN's routes run every 15 minutes, but routes near her run only every 30 or 60 minutes. It's harder to get things done on the weekends when the buses run even less often. When Chris moved here in 2002, the process involved many trade-offs. Finding a home close to fixed-route transit was important for her family. They would have liked to have found a place that was within walking distance to most places she needs to go, but they had to prioritize other considerations like affordability and transit access. Her family has considered moving, but there's a lot to think about, from Chris needing to learn her way around a new neighborhood, to remaining in the same area to keep her daughter in the same school, to the fact that she would have to go farther into the suburbs where she'd have sidewalks but transportation wouldn't be as good and where services and amenities might be not be as nearby. If Chris could change the transportation system, she would start by making sure that more intersections have audible signals, especially at larger intersections.

Image Description: A woman walks with a white cane along a narrow dirt path next to a three-lane road.

Analysis

If I need to move, where can I move that has paratransit access? Will I qualify? What days and hours does paratransit operate? Does it serve the areas I need to go? What are the limitations? If I rely on fixed-route transit, are there safe sidewalks and safe intersection crossings near-by, with curb cuts and audible crossing signals?

These are just some of the questions that transit-reliant disabled people weigh when attempting to balance our housing needs with mobility access, making housing decisions based on proximity to transit, safe crossing and sidewalk conditions, among other accessibility considerations. But many people told us they faced a conundrum where, as Vaughn put it,

"accessibility and affordability compete." Since so many affordable housing options are located farther from good transportation, choosing housing over transportation access very often limits access to community and services.⁴⁸ Take Donovan's experience: his Lakewood housing is more affordable than his previous housing in Bremerton, but nearby transit is infrequent, so he finds it more difficult to get around in his new community. Finding a wheelchair accessible home adds another degree of complexity to an already-onerous puzzle.

Some people told us they preferred to remain in affordable housing that lacked good transit access because they feel well-rooted in their local communities, where the support of their family or friends offsets limits on mobility. We also know that as many in the Baby Boomer generation age out of driving and want to remain in their homes, the need for mobility options in these more rural and exurban areas will only increase.⁴⁹

But more often, the decision to sacrifice transit access for housing comes from

financial necessity. And it's not just lack of transit access. Often the most affordable communities lack sidewalks or safe crossings, both because of historic redlining and because so many affordable areas are more rural or exurban, where pedestrian mobility isn't considered a viable transportation option by developers and planners. That's why it's critical that new housing is constructed inside urban growth boundaries, building otherwise affordable development in rural and exurban areas burdens low-income drivers with significant transportation costs and commute times, and risks stranding those who cannot drive at home.⁵⁰

Access to sidewalks and reliable transit should not translate to unaffordable housing. Living next to a paved street doesn't equate to unaffordability — living next to a paved street with safe crossings, sidewalks and transit service should be the same.⁵¹ We need to stop limiting who can afford this access through how little we choose to fund transit and sidewalks.

Recommendations

—Elected leaders must support zoning changes and public subsidies to construct more affordable and wheelchair-accessible housing near frequent transit and should prioritize housing in new transit-oriented development projects for low-income and disabled nondrivers.

—Elected leaders must limit new housing construction to within urban growth boundaries, to ensure that it can be connected to transit routes and within walkable and rollable distances to essential services.

—As walkable, transit-rich neighborhoods are highly desirable, elected leaders must fund transit service improvements and improvements to infrastructure statewide. Improvements limited to select locations are highly likely to increase the cost of housing, which will only perpetuate displacement.

Access to Employment

Ted*

Ted lives in Cle Elum and walks and rides his bike to get around. He works in Easton, which is about 13 miles from his home via Interstate 90. Ted cannot drive and there is no reliable public transportation in his area. This means he relies on others for transportation to his job. Sometimes, if his transportation person has to cancel, he misses work and this puts him at risk of losing his job. Many times he will ask his transportation person to make a stop at various community services on the way home, like the bank or the gas station. If they say no and the business is not within walking or biking distance, he has to wait for someone else to help him access these places. Ted appreciates that Cle Elum is a relatively safe place to ride a bike to get around. He would benefit greatly from a commuter bus system that serviced upper Kittitas County, which is more rural and doesn't have formal public transit.

**Ted is a pseudonym. Story provided by ElmView.*



Katie

"It is important that I have a job so I can be a little independent and be a part of the community."

Katie lives in La Center with her family. She has a job in Vancouver and isn't able to drive or to take the fixed route commuter bus that goes from La Center to the Vancouver Transit Center. Because of her disability, it's not safe for her to wait alone at the transit center, so she needs something that provides door-to-door service. Unfortunately, La Center is

outside of the area where C-TRAN, the local paratransit provider, offers service. Katie has been getting rides from her caregiver to her job, but that caregiver is leaving and her family hasn't been able to find a replacement. The disability services that Katie receives allow the caregiver to be reimbursed mileage for driving Katie to and from work, but not for the caregiver's time, which makes finding someone more difficult. Katie looked for work in La Center, but there weren't a lot of office-type businesses there that would be a good match for her skills and so the only job she found, after a couple of years of searching, was in Vancouver. Katie really doesn't want to give up the job — she loves being able to earn money and afford things that she wants. She wishes there was paratransit or another shared shuttle service that she could use to get to work.

Image Description: An Asian American young woman with short dark hair smiles. She wears a white shirt with large pink roses on it. Next Page: A light-skinned woman with medium-long blonde hair stands outdoors, smiling. Behind her a river flows between mountains full of trees. : A young man with light skin in a bright orange jacket stands on a sidewalk with his hand on the saddle of the large blue tricycle next to him.

Jenelle

"The long bus commute is one of the reasons I probably will choose not to keep working in Wenatchee. But there are a lot more job opportunities for me in Wenatchee than in Leavenworth. There's only one clinic here in town for me to work at if I want to keep working in mental health."

Jenelle is a Blind mom who lives in Leavenworth. She takes the bus to her job at a mental health clinic in Wenatchee three days a week. The bus stop is too far for her to walk to so her husband drives her. She must leave home at 6:30 a.m. A car trip to Wenatchee is 30 minutes, but the bus stops in many towns along the way, which makes her commute 90 minutes each way. In the dark and icy winter months it's especially hard. Jenelle thinks the bus is a great way to travel, but if she could redesign the transportation system, she would include more, and safer sidewalks and more frequent bus stops. She would give each town on her route its own dedicated express bus to Wenatchee.

"What I used a lot to get from Leavenworth to Seattle was the airport shuttle. But it's pretty expensive — it's about \$50 each way. I did take the train a few times, but it was very inconvenient, it only leaves one time of day at six in the morning and there's often delays, it's not reliable and I can't count on it. Getting longer distances from out here is really difficult. If I were to use the train and bus routes to get from Leavenworth to Olympia, it would take me close to 12 hours, door to door. It's a ridiculous amount of time for travel."



Cody Shane

Cody Shane lives in Chewelah and rides a bike to get around his community. He loves living in Chewelah and finds it pretty easy to get around on his bike, especially since he knows all the side streets and how to avoid the highways. He does wish that towns in Stevens County were more bike friendly, with bike lanes and better snow clearing. And he thinks that cities should be responsible for clearing snow off sidewalks, rather than leaving it to property owners. To get to Spokane or Colville, Cody Shane rides the Real Resources bus. The Real Resources bus runs once a day, departing Chewelah at 7:15 a.m. and returning at 4:30 p.m. That schedule really limits what types of jobs he can have. And, it's not very convenient if you want to run an errand and not wait all day for the return trip. There's no weekend service. The Gold Line bus also goes through Chewelah and runs twice a day, but it can cost almost \$50, so Cody Shane can't afford to ride it regularly. If he had more affordable and frequent bus options, Cody Shane would be able to have dinner with his family, or visit his friends in Spokane more often and do things like go to the movies. He dreams of bus service with 30-minute frequency and of train stations in rural towns, so you could get from Colville all the way to Seattle in a day.

Harry

Harry lives in Vancouver, where he works with regional and national organizations to bring shuttle-type transit services to rural Washington. Harry is the board chair of the Human Services Council and serves as the chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee for C-TRAN. Harry has had a seizure disorder his whole life and for many years he drove. He knew it wasn't ideal, but he thought he didn't have a choice. He knows a lot of people feel the same way. In 1995, he was in a bad accident that made him realize how severe his seizure disorder actually was. He gave

up driving so he would not hurt anyone. Harry's injuries make getting a bus difficult, so he mostly uses paratransit. One barrier is the lack of curb cuts — Harry can walk but cannot always lift his legs over curbs. It was hard to make his full-time job work with transit schedules, so he doesn't work full-time now. He also participates in fewer social activities. A lot of Harry's family lives in Camas and Wenatchee, but the lack of transit makes it hard to visit. He would like the transportation system to be a lot friendlier and provide more freedom and mobility to him and people like him and help them feel more connected.

“My family is all around the state but it's hard to get there to see them and it's hard to get around when I am there. I'd like the freedom to visit.” —Harry, Vancouver

Merribeth

“I have to take two buses to get to the church that I prefer to go to. It could take me 10 or 15 minutes by car. But it takes me a good 45 minutes to an hour to get there and I have to do the reverse on the way back home.”

Merribeth has low vision and lives in Vancouver, Washington. She normally gets around by taking the bus and sometimes by walking. The bus schedule can be difficult, especially when she's scheduled to work on weekends and the bus doesn't run early enough to get her there in time for her shift. She really dislikes having to tell her boss she can't start work until eight because the bus isn't running. Taking an Uber to work, even though it's only a mile and a half away, costs \$15 with tip, so Merribeth can't afford that on a regular basis. When the bus is late, it causes her a lot of anxiety, because she prefers to arrive on time. She's actually been told at work that she clocks in too early, because she

leaves extra time in case the bus is late. Now if she arrives early, she must wait to clock in and start getting paid. If she drove to work, it would take 10 minutes, but getting to the bus, and leaving time for it to be late, takes her 45 minutes. So Merribeth's commute eats up an extra hour of her time each day. She wishes there were more crosstown bus routes and that Vancouver would repair cracked and bumpy sidewalks. She's noticed the city investing a lot in curb ramps, but the sidewalks between are still inaccessible.

“There's a situation a couple weeks ago...I was [at work] 45 minutes early. So I changed into my uniform. But then I still had a half an hour. So I clocked in and started working. It was good that I did because they needed my help. But then I told the assistant boss and he was like, 'you need to have asked if you could clock in early like that.'”

Analysis

Many of the people we interviewed expressed their desire to work, whether for independence, financial stability, social benefits, or to contribute their talents to their communities. Many are highly-skilled professionals or have spent years in college working to get degrees and learn employable skills. But the lack of reliable transit presents a substantial, often unnavigable, hurdle.

Highly fragmented transit service and schedules severely limit the kinds of jobs that disabled transit-reliant people can reach, narrowing the scope of potential employment. Barriers range from no service, to service so infrequent or unreliable that it does not allow people to get to work on time reliably, or, if we can get to work on time, service may end before our shift ends. This is particularly true for industries such as hospitality, manufacturing or gaming where work hours don't conform to the 9-5 workday. This leaves many unable to plan work around transit.

For those who can use transit or paratransit for commuting, the time cost can be exorbitant. [Brian](#) reports up to 14 hours of

daily travel time to commute to his university job in Cheney. Such extreme time costs aren't unusual and leave people to consider self-selecting into a smaller pool of job opportunities, as Jenelle describes, or otherwise limit their employment options.

Ride-hails and taxis are typically only a limited option, usually for time-sensitive job-related travel, like going to an interview. But these services may not be accessible to wheelchair or service animal users and are expensive and, as such, are not financially accessible on a regular basis. People also told us they could sometimes depend on family or friends for rides, but cobbling together these rides was not always dependable and left people feeling indebted to others.

Many mentioned knowing friends who have lost jobs because transit service was cut and they were unable to drive, or who themselves, like Harry, had to scale back to part-time employment, because transit schedules made full-time work unsustainable. Overall, lack of schedules, frequency and limited geographic service areas cut off many disabled nondrivers from job opportunities.

Recommendations

Generally, the policy recommendations laid out in all other sections of this report would additionally improve access to employment. Here are a few specifics:

- Elected leaders should create requirements and incentives for employers to make remote work accessible for more employees.
- Elected leaders must ensure all communities have reliable and affordable high-speed internet access to allow for people to work and learn from home and access resources online.
- Nondrivers need expanded transit/paratransit service hours to access more jobs. See [Transit Frequency, Connections & Schedules](#) for specific recommendations.
- The dearth of affordable housing near population and job centers is increasingly pushing people to suburban and rural areas where transit service is thinnest. See [A Tough Trade-Off](#) for recommendations on housing and land use.

Independence, Community & Well-Being

Jaime

"I wish the world was more accessible. I think most people don't realize the things they take for granted. I don't think they realize that people like me don't have a lot of those freedoms. Being someone that was independent prior to being disabled, it's been hard to get used to depending on a ride. Without driving, we're stuck home. And there are people worse off than myself. I'm fortunate to have a few people that I can depend on, but there are people who definitely don't have that support system whatsoever."

Jaime is an activist and wheelchair user who lives in Pasco. He is the founder of the Tri-Cities Justice Alliance, an organization that fights systemic racism. And he also has a podcast, *Brown, Bearded and Disabled*. Right now he has a caregiver that can drive him where he needs to go, but if his caregiver or his family and friends aren't available to give him rides, he uses paratransit. He finds it really difficult, as a spontaneous person, to have to schedule everything a day in advance. He's had to miss concerts and other events. It's been a hard adjustment since he used to be able to drive. He lives in an older neighborhood in Pasco with sidewalks that are cracked and uneven. The city has tried to repair them, but there are still places that he can't get through by himself in his wheelchair. He gets demoralized about going out because there are so many little obstacles to navigate through the crumbling sidewalk infrastructure.



Image Description: A young brown-skinned man with short beard and thin mustache wearing glasses.

With the global pandemic, a lot of people got to feel what people like myself experience — isolation and having to stay indoors. I was prepared for this pandemic, not because I wanted to be, but because I don't have a ride to get up and go anytime I want to.

—Jaime, Pasco

Clayton

Clayton lives in Friday Harbor. He relies on his parents for rides. It's hard because sometimes his parents are working when he needs to get a ride to his job, which means he has to ask a co-worker for a ride. Aside from asking friends and family, Clayton's only option is to hire a private taxi, but most providers don't offer service to people with wheelchairs. Clayton wishes there was some sort of shuttle that could provide wheelchair accessible rides. Despite the transportation barriers, Clayton loves Friday Harbor because of how small it is and how convenient and close together everything is when you live on a small island. He does really wish it was easier to go places, though.

Bruce

"I believe that if I didn't have this group of friends, I'd already be in assisted living. Friends do things I can't; they happily help me out and take me where I need to go...but it's difficult for them to take me to the mainland because my cart is so heavy. The senior van has a ramp and can take me. But I'm not the only one out here on the island who needs to get to medical appointments on the mainland. So we need that to get straightened out."



Bruce lives in Lopez Village and uses an electric mobility cart to get around. Most people consider it a scooter, but it is heavier and harder to tip over — Bruce describes it as "more than a motorized wheelchair, but less than a car." Bruce got polio when he was three and grew up and lived most of his life before the ADA was passed. Back then, it was more common for people to assume that disabled people were "stupid," and employment discrimination was legal. He feels fortunate that he had great mentors in his life and has been able to build and sail boats, be in a band and design houses. Almost everything Bruce needs is within rolling distance: the market, the pharmacy, the medical clinic where he gets check ups, the community center, the farmers market, the bakery and the taco trailer. His cart has good range, but some friends' homes and the hardware store are too far away to reasonably reach using his cart. Although Lopez Island has almost no sidewalks outside the village, relatively low speed limits on the island keep traffic slowed down. His primary barrier right now is that he doesn't have a way to get to doctor's appointments on the mainland as a result of COVID restrictions. Another challenge is the cost of his mobility cart. His bare-bones cart cost more than \$6,000. He feels fortunate that Medicare covered 80 percent of the cost — he knows that many people require mobility devices with features that can cost more than \$100,000.

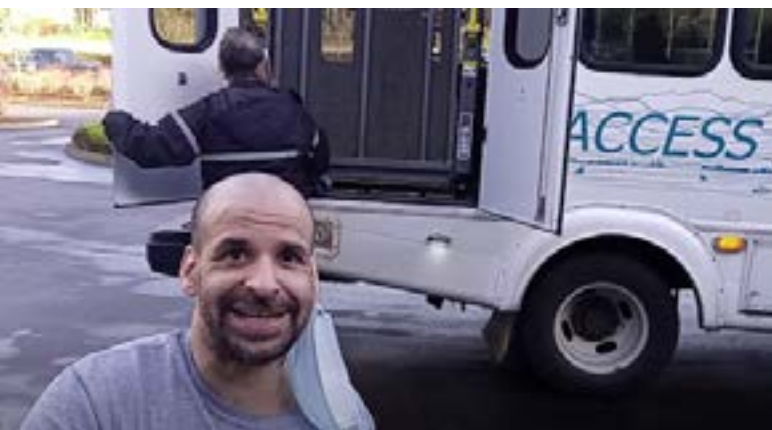
Image Description: A light-skinned older man with glasses, grey hair and a short beard.

Below: A young man in a wheelchair wearing a mask and glasses. He has light skin and short hair.



I'm the outgoing type. I'm always going somewhere. I don't want to have to depend on my parents all the time. Or my friends all the time. It might be inconvenient for them. It's hard finding good transportation.

—Clayton, Friday Harbor



Jamin

“I like my freedom and being able to get out on my own and not have to depend on other people, to just have independence. Paratransit takes care of that for me, it gets me to my appointments, it gets me to grocery shopping. I’ve used these services for all kinds of stuff. It’s a godsend.”

Jamin was born and grew up in Port Orchard. He has been using transit and paratransit for the last ten years. The process for getting paratransit service was

slow and difficult when he first arrived, but Jamin depends on the service to get him where he needs to go. Jamin uses a scooter for mobility, so he can’t navigate stairs or steps. The main street in town, Bay Street, has sidewalks, but they are so inaccessible that he has fallen down trying to catch the bus. A lot of other roads barely have sidewalks or if they do they are really narrow and unsafe, forcing him and others to use the roadway to get through. If Jamin could make his community more accessible, sidewalks would be built wider and maintained well.

“We are your constituents, people that deal with disabilities....What if I was your mother or your son or daughter? A key element to me living a productive life is being able to go see people or get out and go watch the beautiful downtown view we have at the bay, or walk down by the water. We deserve to get around....Give us what we need to live a productive life.”

Image Description: A bold, Black man smiling, a mask dangles from one ear, behind him, a paratransit bus.

Allyson

“A visit to the doctor’s office or a friend’s house could take five or even seven hours round-trip, when it used to take only three hours. There is also a pause every day between 10:45 a.m. and 1:45 p.m. for lunch in this schedule. This is difficult enough that I rarely use the bus system anymore. I requested access to the Dial-A-Ride (DAR) service due to that change in the buses.”

Allyson lives in Selah, which is about five minutes by car from Yakima. It used to be about ten minutes to get to downtown Yakima by bus. However, the Selah bus system no longer connects with the Yakima system, meaning you have to transfer to another bus once you get to Yakima to get to the transit center. The Selah shuttle schedule

is not synced with the Yakima bus schedule, so riders often have to wait an extra hour in each direction due to missed connections. Allyson requested Dial-A-Ride service, which she primarily uses now, but they are only allowed to go to destinations that are three quarters of a mile or closer to the fixed-route line, except for medical appointments. She’s able to use Dial-A-Ride to get to medical appointments and some shopping, but it doesn’t allow her to visit friends or family. Neither offers Sunday service. Allyson says her inability to get to Yakima actually hurts the economy — even before the pandemic she found herself shopping almost entirely online instead of supporting local businesses because the transportation was too difficult.



Both systems [fixed route and paratransit] shut down around 6 p.m., making it impossible to use either system to do anything in the evening away from home. I come from the St. Louis area, where buses run until after midnight and wasn’t really expecting that when I moved here. I can’t imagine what it would be like to try and get back and forth from a job if I worked in Yakima. All of these issues combined have also left me increasingly isolated.

—Allyson, Selah



Joanie

“It’s really hard to be dependent on somebody else to get you where you need to go. You just lose a lot of confidence and independence having to rely on other people for simple things. I live in suburbia and the closest store is over a mile away and our bus stop is about a half a mile away up a road that has no sidewalks. So I’m delighted I have options with my husband. But not everybody does. And I think about these people — how do they get around? How do they get to the store? It’s scary for the future for me.”

Joanie lives in Kirkland. She is losing the ability to drive and now only drives very short distances to the grocery store. For the most part, she relies on her husband to drive her, though in the pandemic she has started walking a lot more and realized that she’s actually able to walk more places in her community than she realized. She has noticed that the sidewalks in her area are in terrible condition and are often blocked by foliage or vehicles, which means that she has to walk in the street. She knows a friend who lost the ability to drive and intentionally moved next to light rail. Joanie is not sure what the future holds for her, especially as the pandemic ends and she wants to start going places again.



“Even though my friends and family and my husband see how hard it is for me, I’m sure that they don’t get it. And it’s hard to know what to say to them to explain it. But they’ll say ‘Oh, just give me a call, I’ll give you a ride.’ Yeah, okay, that could be six times a day. You don’t really mean that?”

Image Description: A light-skinned woman with glasses and shoulder length blond hair smiles. She is standing in front of bright orange leaves.

Yessica*

"Desde que me enteré del autobús que va a Wenatchee de Moses Lake, es el que utilizo para ir a mis citas médicas o cosas personales. Siempre tenía que depender de familiares para que me llevaran y a veces el mismo día del viaje me decían que siempre no me iban a poder llevar. Este servicio me ha hecho sentir independiente y los que manejan el autobús me hacen sentir bienvenida."

Translation: "Ever since I found out about the bus going to Wenatchee from Moses Lake, it's the one I use to go to my medical appointments or for personal trips. I always had to depend on relatives to take me and sometimes on the day of the trip they would cancel on me. This service has made me feel independent and the drivers make me feel welcomed."

**Yessica is a pseudonym. Story provided by People for People.*

Analysis

Across Washington state, people told us how critical access to transportation is for connecting to community for social life, support and assistance, volunteering, and so much more. They shared with us how they recognized that isolation imposed by restricted mobility sometimes negatively impacted their mental health. At the same time, options to work remotely, use telemedicine, or participate remotely in community events or meetings has dramatically improved access for many people for whom transportation is an additional significant barrier to attending anything in person. In particular, continued options for telemedicine and mental health services could ensure nondrivers have access to care.

Many advocates who lack access to cars and would otherwise have been unable to

travel to our state capitol in Olympia to testify to the legislature in person were able to have their voices heard for the first time as the legislature offered remote testimony in the 2021 legislative session. Many with the option to work from home for the first time saw immense time savings, for example Kris has been able to enjoy more time at home and with her kids instead of having to commute two hours each way to Bremerton.

More permanent shifts away from office work and from peak-hour commutes can reduce demand for peak-hour transit, allowing transit agencies to focus on providing more frequent and reliable service throughout the middle of the day, late nights and on weekends. This is also an important shift considering more low-income workers find themselves needing transit outside of the typical rush hour windows and so re-allocating service away from white collar commuters will result in more equitable transit access.⁵²

Recommendations

See recommendations in [Transit Frequency, Connections & Schedules](#), [Specialized Transportation](#) and [Access to Employment](#).

—Agency staff must ensure public meetings offer the options to listen and provide testimony remotely. They should also ensure locations for public meetings are adjacent to frequent transit stops with accessible sidewalks and crossings and that the buildings themselves are wheelchair accessible.

Deterred Demand

Colin

Colin lives in Woodinville near Avondale, in zy (Colin's preferred pronoun) own words "pretty much the middle of nowhere." Colin uses a cane or crutches and, on bad days, a manual wheelchair. Usually, Colin would take the bus everywhere, though sometimes zy is able to get rides from friends and family. Currently, the two King County Metro bus routes, near where Colin lives, the 931 and the 232, are indefinitely suspended. Even when they ran, the last bus ran at 7:30 p.m. on weekdays, with no service on weekends and no service in the middle of weekdays. Colin once got stuck in Redmond coming back from a

doctor's appointment in Seattle. Colin's first bus got stuck in traffic, so zy missed the last bus home and had to pay for a super-expensive Uber. Colin has seen transit service where zy lives get worse and worse throughout the years and zy is concerned that these cuts will remain permanent. The nearest bus stop now is a two-hour walk up a road with no sidewalks. The lack of sidewalks is a safety concern for Colin. When the buses stop on Colin's street, they have to park in the opposite lane of traffic to have enough space to get the ramp down. There's also no light to cross the street at the nearest bus stop.

They did a survey and decided that not enough people were riding that bus, which was why they originally cut some of its hours. And then they decided still not enough people were riding the bus so they cut more hours and still not enough people were riding the bus so they cut more hours and more trips. As somebody who was riding the bus throughout that entire time, very consistently people who would get on the bus and comment to the bus driver that they couldn't reliably get anywhere anymore. The reason they didn't ride the bus anymore was because its schedule was so reduced that it was non-functional.

—Colin, Woodinville

"For a while, I lived right in downtown Everett. I could go on the spur of the moment very easily. Buses were very close by....I'd like to just go to the mall on the spur of the moment. And they don't even have bus service there now on Sundays. That's the day I would most likely want to just get out.

"Having a bus route nearby is at the top of my list every time I move. Where is the bus stop, where are the bus routes? Are they in places where I can see it to get across the street? All of that enters into why I pick where I'm at."

—Marilee, Everett

Image Description: A light-skinned older woman with glasses, long beaded earrings that fall to her shoulders and a green face mask, wearing a t-shirt that says: Disability Mobility Initiative."



Marilee

Marilee lives in Everett. She relies on paratransit, fixed route buses, friends, family and walking. Her biggest barriers are the time it takes to plan a trip — checking schedules, making a paratransit appointment, and making sure she has a way back. It's hard to make appointments, like going to the doctor, with all of that. Marilee has tried Dial-A-Ride Transit (DART) and King County Metro's ACCESS, but they were both late and then ate into her schedule by 45 minutes or an hour. With some bus routes, it can take two and a half hours for a 20-minute ride. It's also extremely frustrating that the different transit systems don't connect well. She often has to forgo doing things she'd like because she can't get a ride and the public transit trip time would take a full day. She would like people who have always been able to drive to know there's a huge amount of planning that anybody that drives a car never thinks about and to park their cars and try to get around for a month by finding the bus or calling a friend to get there.

Andrew

"One time I had stopped at Arby's to get myself dinner after work. And it's pitch black when I got out of the restaurant. I'm there cruising on one side of the road, hoping not to get run over. Because of all the headlights I couldn't really see. Some guy yelled at me and I'm like, 'Well, there's no sidewalk!'"



Andrew lives in Covington and uses a walker or manual wheelchair to get around. He mostly gets rides from his caregiver, because he finds it difficult to use the bus. Andrew gave up on using buses because he was not able to use the ramps independently when they were so often angled too steeply as a result of missing or poorly maintained sidewalks at bus stops and bus drivers aren't permitted to help push. He finds paratransit frustrating as well, because they always seem to show up an hour and a half later than scheduled. He used to live in Auburn and had a job with the Seahawks. Paratransit wasn't reliable, so his mom would have to skip church to drive him to work.

The lack of curb ramps and sidewalks around Covington are also barriers. He ends up cutting through parking lots because the sidewalks don't connect and he worries about getting hit by a car. He's had a lot of trouble trying to cross Highway 516, next to the Home Depot where he used to work. There's no curb cut at 185th street there — instead, he had to use a driveway and roll in the street. He wishes the lights along this highway were better timed for pedestrians, with more time to cross and shorter wait times. He's asked for changes, but Covington responded that they can't do much because Highway 516 is a state highway. He really wishes more sidewalks would get built, especially along main streets. It would save him a lot of time that he spends trying to detour through back streets and parking lots.

"I'd make sure there were a lot of good smooth curb cuts, everywhere. And that you had 35 seconds to cross the street, like you do in Bellevue. At the highway intersections here you have about three seconds and then you almost get slammed. And the light takes 15 minutes to change."

Image Description: A light-skinned man with short dark hair and dark glasses smiles. He wears a dark blue rain jacket and stands at a metal railing. In the background is wet asphalt and beyond that, an empty horse-racing track.

John

"I live uptown and my wheelchair has good range, so I can go downtown for theater or concerts. But there are other places I can't go, like Ft. Worden. It is only two miles from home, but the roads have no sidewalks. I'm just not comfortable riding on the side of the road."

John has ALS and lives in Port Townsend. He uses a power wheelchair and uses Dial-A-Ride to get to local medical appointments. Prior to COVID he used the scheduled buses to go to the grocery. When John moved to Port Townsend in 2013, he made sure his new home had a bus stop close by because he has had mobility challenges since 1971 when he was hit head-on by a drunk driver. The Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) he sustained in that crash impaired his left leg. In 2017, he was diagnosed with a form of ALS that has caused muscle atrophy in his right leg and right arm. Prior to getting his power wheelchair in 2018, he used a walker. He stopped driving in 2017. He does feel more limited now that he cannot drive. He needs to plan more in advance and Jefferson Transit buses do not operate on Sunday when some of the local events John would like to attend occur. He avoids going out at night, even just to the library across the street, because it is too hard to see uneven places on the sidewalk and he is afraid he will go off the edge. Every three months, he needs to go to Swedish Hospital in Seattle to attend a four-hour ALS clinic. He uses multiple public transit buses to get to Seattle and in Seattle he uses wheelchair accessible taxis for this trip, but must get lodging in Seattle and return home the next day because transit service is not available to return home before dark. John finds that overall Port Townsend has been responsive to the local disability community's work to get the city to put in proper curb cuts and make sidewalk repairs. He is grateful that the

Jefferson Transit buses are accessible and that the drivers are always helpful. It would be ideal to have wheelchair accessible taxi service in Port Townsend, like Seattle has, so that he would have an option for unexpected transportation needs as well as for times when buses are not running. A morning connection by Jefferson Transit or the Dungeness Line to the early Kitsap Fast Ferry from Kingston would help John make the round trip to Seattle without an overnight stay. He also would appreciate it if the Dungeness Line made a stop at the Swedish Cherry Hill campus in addition to the First Hill campus. That extra half mile he has to navigate on a cold, rainy day makes this long journey even more difficult.

"I have to plan in advance. It used to be that if I needed something to make dinner, I could just jump in the car and go down to the co-op. Now I don't have that option. I have my groceries delivered every two weeks."



Image Description: An elder light-skinned man with short silver hair, beard, and mustache sits in a powerchair on a bright day near his home framed by green shrubs, tulips, and daffodils with Port Townsend Bay in the background.

Analysis

The phenomenon of induced demand in traffic planning can easily be understood in the truism “If you build it, they will come.” It follows logically and in our experiences that “If you don’t build it, they cannot come.” While inadequate service and infrastructure is usually characterized in the transportation field as unmet demand, our stories reflect more than unmet demand — they reflect widespread deterred demand — infrastructure and service conditions that, actively or passively, frustrate and discourage use.

Almost everyone we interviewed reflected on the numerous, persistent barriers presented by our transportation system that do in fact discourage them from traveling around their communities, let alone outside our communities. There are many trips that might be possible, but are simply too difficult, complicated, time-consuming, or conflict with other necessities. Many people told us they put off medical appointments or behavioral healthcare. Impediments include some incredibly hostile physical infrastructure or equipment or other conditions that result in our reducing or eliminating trips. And this is not just a result of service frequency or limited geographical coverage, it’s also the absence of a safe network of sidewalks or intersections, or,

as with [Andrew](#), the incompatibility of bus equipment with sidewalk conditions.

Policy architects and political leaders need to be very clear on what deterred demand translates into: a great number of trips that simply are not taken. Some of them aren’t taken for straightforward practical reasons: the absence of transit or paratransit service, infrequent service or unreliable service that make trips impossible or so physically or psychologically demanding that they are not taken, or are taken far less often than needed or preferred. Yes, John can have his groceries delivered every two weeks, but this does not translate into his not needing or wanting more grocery store trips. While Lilly recognizes that curtailing social time with friends eats away at her mental health, planning and making trips is often so arduous that forgoing them feels like her best option. Several people told us they would shop more with better mobility access, which suggests some untapped economic opportunity that could be better captured.

We also need to start counting who doesn’t have access to driving. The American Community Survey only collects information on the number of vehicles per household, erasing the experiences of individuals within households who may not be able to drive or have reliable access to a vehicle.

Recommendations

—Agency staff should collaborate with nondrivers to create a measure for deterred demand to assess which trips people forgo because accessing existing transportation is too much of a burden.

—Agency staff should work to develop better data on who does not have access to driving, and their mobility needs and desires, looking at individuals as well as households.

Inclusive Transportation Planning

Erica

“There are people who are going around with a checklist of ADA requirements and they don’t have people with various disabilities in the room when they’re designing transit and streets. A lot of disabled people only have the energy for 10 or 15 hours a week of work. So, they have zero chance of getting into the room. We need funding to bring these people into the room where these things are designed.”

Erica lives in Edmonds. She mostly takes the bus because that is the only way she can travel with the heavy, motorized wheelchair that her disabilities require and the wheelchair doesn’t fit in her car. Erica’s greatest barrier is just getting around. Often, when bus drivers are behind schedule they will leave her at stops, sometimes multiple times at the same stop on the same day. Some transit agency wheelchair lifts and buses are designed better than others, but some can cause motion sickness or don’t work for people with multiple disabilities. Erica’s ideal accessible community would have sidewalks on every street, including smaller residential streets and many more resources directed to transit and increased frequency, so she could just know that a bus will be going her way every 15 minutes.



Image Description: A young light-skinned woman smiles. Her long brown hair is pulled back in a ponytail and she wears a black t-shirt with the Disability Mobility Initiative logo in white print. A powerchair sits in the background over her shoulder.



I like to be able to move around my community and Seattle and enjoy the area I live in. And I’m blocked from doing that as much as people who legislators think of as their typical constituent. I feel like I’m not a consideration when things are being built.

—Erica, Edmonds





Maud

“Not being able to get around the city because of lack of access is not an inconvenience — it significantly interferes with the ability to get necessities like health care, getting to work, getting food, in addition to having a life: seeing friends, getting to council meetings, attending community events. It’s the difference between being able to have a life in the community and not have a life in the community.”

Maud is a disability activist and lifelong crutch user who now also uses a powerchair. She does not drive or have a wheelchair accessible van, so she relies on public transportation. Maud lives in dread of snowy winters where the snow will block sidewalks and curb cuts and keep her trapped at home. She is also frustrated by the lack of sidewalks in Seattle. For instance, she has to navigate a stretch of Sand Point Way with cars if she’s trying to get to a city beach near her home. She is also frustrated that only two wheelchairs will fit on a bus. She could be forced to wait out in the weather without shelter or a restroom and that causes adverse health impacts for her because of her disability.

Image Description: A light-skinned woman with short blonde hair with a big smile on her face. Behind her, green ferns.

We are always, it seems, an afterthought. Like, ‘Oh, it’s not accessible, oh, well, then you, you disabled person need to point that out to us. And maybe we’ll fix it and maybe we won’t.’ You know, it’s been 30 years since the ADA was passed. So, at this point, I have lost patience with entities who say, we haven’t gotten to that access piece yet. Policymakers need to be accountable for seeing access as a non-negotiable necessity. We are not an exception. We are part of ‘We the People.’ And the rights that everyone without a disability has are the rights that we need policymakers to ensure people with disabilities have.

—Maud, Seattle

Analysis

It’s not an exaggeration to say almost everyone we interviewed expressed a sense that their mobility needs are afterthoughts and that they are substantially left out of the processes that shape transportation systems. The perpetual barriers and constraints they face reinforce these feelings — and reality — every day, all day.

To overcome the barriers and implement the recommendations we identified in this report, nondrivers must be included in decision making boards and executive leadership of transit and transportation agencies.

Stand-alone “accessibility” committees are insufficient as a resource for the transformation required to make our transportation system fully accessible and equitable. Especially concerning are unpaid advisory committees. At a minimum, compensation recognizes the value of our time and years of lived experience that forms the basis of this expertise, as well as the time and energy required for this consultation.^{72 73}

To be clear, we don’t need new processes or new accessibility committees that risk sidelining us. Our voices must be welcomed into rooms and conversations where these decisions are already happening. From broad policy and funding considerations, down to the details about how we board a bus or navigate a ride-booking system, our voices must continually be sought out for our expertise and that expertise must be increasingly reflected in every aspect of existing processes and structures that build our transportation networks, procure equipment and communicate about service.

At a minimum, transportation and transit agencies need to stop requiring driver licenses for jobs where driving is not an essential job function. The requirement to lift 50lbs is also often listed, another relic of our sexist and ableist history. If you automatically exclude people who can’t drive from transportation planning jobs, you won’t get our perspective at the table.

Recommendations

—Agency staff need to stop requiring driver licenses for jobs where driving is not an essential job function. Agency staff must review every job posting to ensure the job requirements match the job description and remove unnecessary requirements that serve as barriers to exclude low-income, disabled and BIPOC applicants who have the lived experience to perform the job.

—Agency staff must actively recruit nondrivers for agency and leadership positions, recognizing that there is no more important credential than lived experience.

—Agency staff must compensate all advisory committees or other accessibility and equity consultant work and must create transparent accountability processes to ensure this work leads to concrete changes.

Elected Leaders

State, county and city elected officials

Pedestrian Network

—Elected leaders must fund the completion of Washington’s pedestrian network, including missing sidewalks, curb ramps and accessible pedestrian signals on arterial crossings.

—Elected leaders should assign responsibility for repairing and maintaining sidewalks to local jurisdictions, including responsibility for keeping sidewalks clear of snow, ice and vegetation.

Transit

—Elected leaders must fund public transit agencies to expand their service areas and to increase frequency, reliability and service hours and so transit agencies can focus on providing reliable, accessible service rather than chasing revenue through collecting fares.

— Elected leaders must fund more inter-urban rail and bus service, particularly between smaller towns and beyond the population centers of King, Pierce, Kitsap and Snohomish Counties.

—Elected leaders must decriminalize fare evasion to minimize the harm experienced by those unable to provide proof of payment.

—Elected leaders must recognize public transit’s central role in climate mitigation and prioritize its funding and expansion with urgency.

Land Use

—Elected leaders must support zoning changes and public subsidies to construct more affordable and wheelchair-accessible housing near frequent transit and should prioritize housing in new transit-oriented development projects for low-income and disabled non-drivers.

—Elected leaders must limit new housing construction to within urban growth boundaries, to ensure that it can be connected to transit routes and within walkable and rollable distances to essential services.

—As walkable, transit-rich neighborhoods are highly desirable, elected leaders must fund improvements to transit service and to infrastructure statewide. Improvements limited to select locations are highly likely to increase the cost of housing, which will only perpetuate displacement.

Jobs, Inclusion & Community Access

—Elected leaders should create requirements and incentives for employers to make remote work accessible for more employees.

—Elected leaders must ensure all communities have reliable and affordable high-speed internet access to allow for people to work and learn from home.

Agency Staff

Transportation and transit agency staff in state, regional and local jurisdictions

Jobs, Inclusion & Community Access

—Agency staff must ensure public meetings offer the options to listen and provide testimony remotely. They should also ensure locations for public meetings are adjacent to frequent transit stops with accessible sidewalks and crossings and that the buildings themselves are wheelchair accessible.

—Agency staff need to stop requiring driver licenses for jobs where driving is not an essential job function. Agency staff must review every job posting to ensure the job requirements match the job description and remove unnecessary requirements that serve as barriers to exclude low-income, disabled and BIPOC applicants who have the lived experience to perform the job.

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—Agency staff should collaborate with nondrivers to create a measure for deterred demand to assess which trips people forgo because accessing existing transportation is too much of a burden.

—Agency staff should work to develop better data on who does not have access to driving, and their mobility needs and desires, looking at individuals as well as households.

Resilience

—Agency staff must plan for the needs of nondrivers and disabled community members in emergencies by including us in the decision-making process.

— Agency staff must plan for operational resilience, including design and procurement of equipment that can withstand severe weather extremes and communication strategies to inform riders when routes or procedures change in an emergency.

Transit Providers

Leadership and staff at transit agencies and specialized transportation service providers

Transit Service

—Transit agencies must ensure bus stops are located adjacent to key destinations like shopping, medical services, education, social services and open space/recreation.

—Transit agencies must coordinate between jurisdictions to reduce long transfer wait times, especially connecting commuter trains to bus routes and between different bus systems.

Wayfinding, Equipment & Shelter

- Transit agencies should build shelters and seating at every bus stop. Folding seats must be easily folded down or up with little physical effort. Shelter placement must not block bus ramp access in conjunction with sidewalks and curbs.
- Transit agencies should install Braille signage at all transit stops and ensure all transit has functioning audio systems to announce upcoming stops and to identify the route to riders about to board.
- Transit agencies must build multiple elevators in elevated or underground stations, as well as ADA accessible ramps, to mitigate elevator failures and ensure prompt repair when failures occur..
- Transit agencies must install automatic doors on transit station entrances.
- Transit agencies must purchase and/or retrofit transit vehicles, including rail, to include more flexible space for those using mobility devices and to accommodate strollers, grocery carts and baggage.
- Transit agencies should partner with local jurisdictions to ensure there are sidewalks, curb ramps and accessible pedestrian signals within a one-mile radius of each stop and that there is a signalized crosswalk at every stop.
- Transit agencies should improve digital communication to help riders track paratransit and bus arrivals and other real-time information including current reroutes and other service changes.

Driver Training & Fare Enforcement

- Transit agencies should review and update operational policies on how to handle full ADA spaces and should collect and publish data on how frequently riders are denied boarding because ADA space is at capacity.
- Transit agencies should invest in additional training for drivers on how to assist disabled riders with wayfinding and communication, boardings and de-boardings and proper mobility device securement.
- Transit agencies must ensure that staff, whatever their roles, have a deep understanding of the communities they serve and hire staff from these communities. And transit agencies must train agency staff to appropriately assist BIPOC, immigrant and disabled riders.
- Transit agencies should explicitly discourage drivers from fare policing. Boarding denials should be demonstrably based on passenger and driver safety.
- Transit agencies should coordinate farebox policies across different jurisdictions to reduce confusion and conflict.

Specialized Transportation Services

- Transit agencies should reduce barriers to qualify for paratransit. This should involve reducing paperwork, permitting applicants to self-identify as low-income and speeding up the timeline for approval.

- Specialized transportation service providers should create and improve tools to better facilitate communication among riders, drivers and dispatchers and should develop ways for riders to more accurately anticipate and track the arrival of their drivers.

- Specialized transportation service providers need to increase coordination across jurisdictions to ensure greater consistency and access and allow riders greater ease in traveling across service boundaries. They should also coordinate in the design and procurement processes to reduce variation in accessibility features, providing riders with more predictability and assurance of system navigability.

- Specialized transportation service providers must purchase vehicles that accommodate infant car seats and should provide car seats for larger children. The same accessibility requirements should apply to publicly funded last-mile transit providers, like Via to Transit and other publicly licensed ride-hail and taxi service providers.

- Specialized transportation service providers should allow parents and caregivers to travel with their children and other family members.

- Specialized transportation service providers that use volunteer drivers must plan for resilience, understanding that operating models that skew toward overreliance on volunteers can leave the people they serve vulnerable when those drivers are not available.

Transportation Departments

Leadership and staff of city and county transportation departments and, when possible, supported by leadership and staff at the Washington State Department of Transportation

Pedestrian Network

- Local jurisdictions must create and implement standards that limit placement of furniture, street cafes, signage, garbage cans, cars and micromobility device parking to ensure the sidewalk and curb ramps remain accessible.

- Local jurisdictions should employ design and engineering techniques that delay or minimize the encroachment of roots, frost heaves and other wear to prolong the useful lifespan of sidewalks.

- Local jurisdictions must clearly define standards and ensure compliance for accessible construction detours, both for short and long-term construction projects.

- Local jurisdictions must improve signal timing for pedestrians, with shorter wait times between cycles (60-90 seconds) and more time for pedestrians to safely cross the full distance of intersections, no faster than 2.5 feet per second.

- Local jurisdictions must revoke permissive right-turn-on-red codes and strictly limit the use of “free” left turns that put vulnerable road users in the path of drivers.

- Local jurisdictions must ensure that ADA parking spots are wide enough to accommodate vans and that adequate space is left around both left and right sides of the vehicle space for people with wheelchairs to safely get in and out.

—Local jurisdictions must standardize tactile markings for driveways, bike lanes, shared bicycle pedestrian spaces and transit stops.

—Local jurisdictions should partner with researchers and developers to include accessible walking and rolling routes that allow users to plan around curb ramps, accessible pedestrian signals and hills/slopes.

Ride-hail/Taxis

—Local jurisdictions must require all shared-use vehicles (including ride-hail, taxi and any future autonomous first/last-mile services) to provide wheelchair accessible vehicles.

—Local jurisdictions should require ride-hails and taxis to allow riders to set a specific location/side of the street for pickup and require drivers to be trained on how to assist Blind/DeafBlind/low vision customers in locating the vehicle. They should also require data on pickup failures of passengers with service animals to monitor if riders with service animals are being denied rides.

—Local jurisdictions should consider partnering with port authorities and their airporter franchises to provide additional inter-city service in rural areas that lack other transportation options.

—Local jurisdictions should develop an accessible ride-hail model program for low-income disabled people to get access to on-demand and emergency transportation, when paratransit or community shuttle providers cannot meet their immediate needs.

Image Description: Half a dozen people standing and one person seated and gathered on a grassy spot next to a chain-link fence for a press conference. Several people hold large umbrellas and all are dressed in winter clothing. One person stands behind a video camera on a tripod while another records with a hand-held device.



Next Steps

If the recommendations we make here seem enormous and costly that is because they reflect decades of underinvestment in equitable and truly accessible mobility. To begin to address this inequity, we recommend two major actions:

- Shift resources to prioritize funding accessible pedestrian infrastructure and reliable transit service.
- Look to nondrivers as transportation decision makers and experts.

In addition to federal investments that prioritize highways, the 18th Amendment of the Washington State Constitution, passed in the 1940's, has limited the gas tax, our main transportation revenue source, to highway projects. As more vehicles electrify and alternatives to the gas tax are considered, these new revenue sources must be invested in multimodal infrastructure and transit service. And while we are still reliant on the gas tax, decision makers must challenge the long-standing assumptions about which transportation projects are eligible for gas tax revenue.

To ensure this redistribution of resources, nondrivers must have a seat at the table. This begins with transportation planners and decision makers viewing us as the

experts we are. Our knowledge is rooted in years of navigating sidewalks, buses and paratransit systems that most transportation professionals rarely use.

As we emphasized in [Inclusive Transportation Planning](#), we aren't talking about the creation of volunteer accessibility or equity committees with little chance of securing the resources needed for real change. We must be involved and offered full access to meaningfully contribute to policy and planning decisions.

We've seen that most transportation research, planning, and implementation is conducted by non-disabled drivers, and almost exclusively cites the expertise of planners and service providers, wholly overlooking disabled users of the transportation system. This is not the end of our work, but this paper is a significant step toward remedying that gap. For their part, decision makers must take the opportunity this paper presents you to put our collective knowledge and decades of lived experience to provide the foundation for designing and building a more accessible and equitable transportation system.

Image Description: A woman holding a white cane & wearing a neon Disability Mobility Initiative vest stands on a sidewalk with other people wearing neon vests.



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Image Description: Three people in neon vests and construction hard hats walking in a parking lot. One person has a white cane and is wearing a Disability Mobility t-shirt.

