

Transportation for Youth with Disabilities

A Guide for Students and Families

Transportation Challenges

Accessible, affordable, and reliable transportation is a critical component of competitive integrated employment, independence, and self-sufficiency. There are many transportation challenges for youth and adults with disabilities, including limited accessible, affordable, and reliable transportation options, multiple funding streams from various federal, state, and local agencies, differences in provider service hours, coverage, and issues related to provider jurisdiction. In a [2017 National Household Travel Survey](#), over 25 million Americans with disabilities age 5 and older reported difficulty accessing the transportation they needed, and more than 3 million said they were homebound as a result. A [2018 survey from the US Department of Transportation](#) found that adults aged 25 or older and people with disabilities were more than twice as likely as people without disabilities to report some level of transportation insecurity.

Rural communities face even greater barriers to accessible transportation. A significant lack of funding means that public and accessible transportation is often in short supply. The same study found that at least 12 million individuals living in rural communities, or 41% of the rural population, live in counties without public transportation. In a recent transportation roundtable held in southern Indiana with transportation providers, people with disabilities, local policy makers, and providers considered the following main barriers to transportation:

- Availability and reliability of public transportation
- Access to and cost of public transportation
- Lack of transportation coordination
- Lack of awareness of transportation options
- Hours of operation for public transportation
- Availability of ridesharing
- Anxiety about using public transportation

Transportation Planning

For students with disabilities, jobs are much easier to find and keep when reliable transportation is available. Transportation after high school involves assessing students' needs, identifying accessible options, and developing strategies that lead to safe and reliable travel. As with all transition planning, the earlier the discussion of transportation begins, the better. Planning involves awareness of community transportation providers, training for school and

transportation providers about student support needs, and building transportation skills into the Transition Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Key Aspects of Transportation Planning

- **Needs assessment:** Transportation planning begins with assessing a student's current transportation skills and limitations, including physical mobility, learning strategies, and sensory needs. Identifying specific transportation challenges allows for addressing them through training experiences, skill development, or finding transportation alternatives. This outlines the supports that students and their families can provide.
- **Collaboration:** It is important to engage school staff, community transportation providers, and relevant agencies to discuss transportation options, accessibility, and potential barriers. Talking to public transportation systems helps to understand accessible features of the local public transportation systems, if available.
- **Transition goals:** Once the needs assessment is complete and options outlined, educators should incorporate them into the transition plan, focusing on skills like navigating public transportation, using assistive devices, and communicating transportation needs to public systems.
- **Transportation training and support:** During high school, students must learn to use public transportation. Students should learn how to advocate for their support needs with other providers.
- **Transportation options:** Transportation options include school-provided services, public transportation, personal vehicles, and ride sharing. Knowing all the options allows for backup plans when something doesn't work out.
- **Addressing accessibility concerns:** Early planning will help to identify and address any physical barriers at bus stops, transportation hubs, or other access points.

Important Considerations

Students must be actively involved in the decision-making process regarding transportation plans. Transition teams should monitor progress and adjust the transportation plan, as needed. It is also a good idea for students to connect to local mobility planning efforts to promote awareness and understanding about the transportation needs of other individuals with disabilities within the community.

Funding Opportunities

While transportation after high school is primarily the student's responsibility, funding is available to help with vehicle modifications. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) supports transportation services to help people with disabilities get to and from VR services, job

interviews, and other work-related activities. These services can include public and private transportation, such as paratransit, shared rides, and taxis. VR can also fund modifications to vehicles to make them accessible. Other state and local funding options and travel tips are outlined in the Indiana Family to Family fact sheets below.

- [Vehicle Modifications](#)
- [Accessible Travel](#)
- [Other Funding Options](#)

Innovative Transportation Options

People with disabilities, particularly in rural areas, need accessible, affordable transportation options that bring employment, health care, education, and community life within reach. Over the past several years, groups have been working to develop new approaches. Becoming familiar with how other communities address this need can help design solutions that work locally.

Employer-Provided Transportation and Reasonable Accommodations

Employers do not have to provide transportation to and from work for employees with disabilities. However, some businesses in rural communities have begun working to ensure their employees can get to work. It is easy to see why reliable transportation benefits employers and leads to a more stable workforce.

Employers may have to provide other accommodations, such as changing an employee's schedule to match available transportation, reassigning an employee to a location closer to their home, or allowing an employee to telecommute. As with any accommodation under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), when considering such changes, employers can choose among effective options and do not have to provide it if that change would impose an undue hardship on the business.

Technology

Artificial intelligence and mobile phone navigation tools can help anyone, including youth with disabilities, to navigate their surroundings. Technology management systems help coordinate multiple transportation options, schedule, streamline communication, and set reminders about pickups. Enlarged text and audio cues are available in those applications to accommodate individual needs.

Accessible Vehicles

Accessible vehicles with wide doors and flat floors can be designed to accommodate people who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices. Environmental modifications, such as ramps can help make public transportation more accessible. If using a vehicle for transportation to work,

Vocational Rehabilitation may be able to assist with funding for the purchase or modification of an accessible vehicle or adaptive driving equipment. Fully autonomous vehicles have the potential to reshape the transportation landscape for people with disabilities, especially those who cannot get a driver's license. The [We Will Ride Campaign](#) was founded by disability rights leaders to ensure that the transportation revolution of autonomous vehicles reaches its potential to serve all Americans.

Exemplary Programs

The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) recognizes exemplary transportation programs. In 2023, the NADTC profiled 14 organizations in six categories through an [innovation showcase](#): accessibility, coordination, cross jurisdictional boundaries, equity, health care access, and technology.

Steps to Promote Local Options

To ensure there are more options locally, families and students with disabilities can advocate for increased options and coordination by bringing together transportation providers, local policymakers, and individuals with disabilities and their families to design local solutions. At the transportation roundtable held in southern Indiana, the group came to the following recommendations to improve options locally:

- Identify and share all mobility options in the area, including a listing with contact information.
- Expand transportation options through advocacy in areas where public transportation is unavailable.
- Identify and promote adequate funding options, including collaboration with county governments to use local funding for transportation.
- Recruit businesses to be part of the solution through funding and/or providing transportation themselves.

The bottom line is that adequate funding must be provided for transportation programs and new private and public sector models. Some states have established vouchers for transportation-related costs. Local, state, and federal policies must support the availability and accessibility of all modes of public transportation.

Resources

- ✓ [Administration on Community Living and Transportation](#): ACL is a federal program that supports innovation in services for people with disabilities.
- ✓ [Transit Planning 4 All Initiative](#): ACL supports the development of convenient, affordable, and accessible transportation options that enable people with disabilities,

older adults, and caregivers to travel to work, volunteer, spend time with family and friends, and enjoy entertainment, recreational, and religious activities.

- ✓ [Inclusive Mobility on Demand Program](#): This funding opportunity weaves together inclusive transportation planning, development, and implementation with grassroots-driven mobility on demand solutions.
- ✓ [ACL Transportation Listening Session Summary Report](#): ACL conducted a virtual one-hour listening session in 2021. The session identified transportation needs, experiences, and barriers for people with disabilities, older adults, and their caregivers. They also explored solutions and strategies.
- ✓ [Accessible Transportation Resource Center \(ATRC\)](#): This organization was created in 2022 as a national technical assistance center to advance accessible transportation. ATRC's mission is to make transportation systems, vehicles, services, apps, and websites accessible for people with disabilities, older adults, historically underserved populations, and the general population. The center carries out this work by increasing awareness and adoption of transportation accessibility strategies, inclusive planning, and Mobility on Demand (MOD) transportation systems.
- ✓ [U.S. Department of Transportation Accessibility Initiatives](#): The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) is a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) program administered by Easterseals and the ACL. NADTC's goal is to promote the availability and accessibility of transportation options for older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers.
- ✓ [Equity in Transportation for People with Disabilities](#): The American Association of Persons with Disabilities (AAPD) ensures equal access to reliable, affordable transportation for people with disabilities by advocating for federal transportation investments that connect people with disabilities to employment opportunities, health care, education, and community.
- ✓ [Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility \(CCAM\)](#): Promotes interagency cooperation and the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to minimize duplication and overlap of federal programs and services, so that they have access to more transportation services. CCAM is looking at ways to improve transportation through cost-sharing. This would lead to increased availability, enhanced efficiency, and improved accessibility.
- ✓ [Vocational Rehabilitation](#): Options for individuals with disabilities who need assistance traveling to VR services, including mileage reimbursement, bus passes, and training to use public transportation. In addition, assistance with purchasing an accessible vehicle or vehicle modifications may be available if the individual meets qualifications.

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