

Transportation Accessibility Institute

May 22, 2023

Summary



OVERVIEW

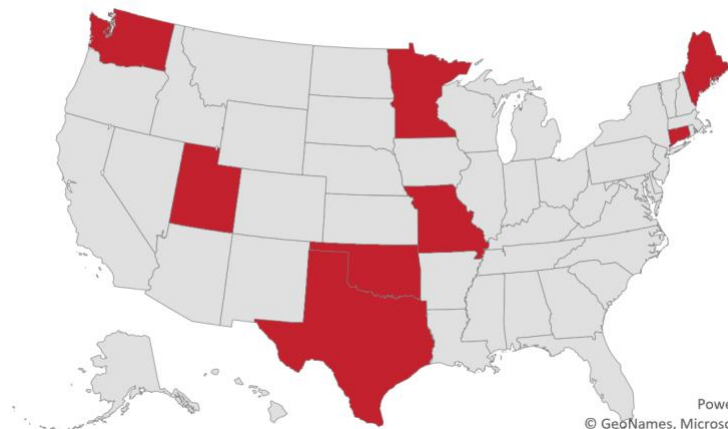
On May 22, 2023, [Transit Planning 4 All](#) hosted the Transportation Accessibility Institute in Oklahoma City, OK. The daylong event provided teams from across the country an opportunity to discuss transportation accessibility, learn about inclusive planning, build partnerships, and ultimately, formulate solutions to accessibility challenges in their communities.

In the morning, the TP4A partners gave presentations on inclusive planning and accessibility, and in the afternoon, teams worked together to identify solutions to transportation accessibility issues and challenges. In this summary, you'll find an overview of those discussions, as well as an in-depth look at some of the specific challenges and solutions that these teams came up with.

SELECTION PROCESS

TP4A welcomed applications from teams across the country. In order to promote partnerships and bring together important voices from different experiences and industries, each team had to include representation from people with disabilities, older adults, health care providers or plans, public transportation, local government/planning agencies, caregivers, and organizations that serve people with disabilities and/or older adults (CILs, AAAs, UCEDDs, ADRCs, Assistive Technology Act Programs, CCH's). After a competitive application process, TP4A selected eight teams, some with members from all over the state and some focused on one area or town.

- Western Connecticut
- York County, Maine
- Grand Rapids, Minnesota
- Seattle, Washington
- St. Louis, Missouri
- Utah
- Northern Texas
- Oklahoma



DISCUSSION ON TRANSPORTATION ACCESSIBILITY

Dave Somers from USAgin led the room in discussing accessibility as a large group. Here are some of the barriers identified by attendees:

- Ensuring that companies and agencies follow the laws around accessibility (such as the ADA) is difficult, and there can be professional repercussions for pressuring companies to change.
- Often, projects are designed without accessibility in mind, and so when changes to projects are made, they are being fit into an inaccessible design.
- Even when accessible projects are greenlit, it's important to have someone there during the building phase. Sometimes, the accessibility that was there in the plans doesn't get translated to the actual building.
- Consistency. One person might focus on or care about accessibility, but their successor may not. Or, one area is accessible, but others are ignored.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

In the afternoon, teams identified transportation accessibility issues in their own communities, then narrowed them down into one to three issues that they wanted to address that day.

Some of the challenges that teams came up with included:

- Coordination; getting everyone to the table
- Pedestrian barriers
 - High stripes on crosswalks are a mobility challenge
 - Some curbs don't extend far enough into the street, making it difficult for drivers to see pedestrians
- Signage in transit systems
- Recruitment for drivers and other transit personnel
- Communication
- Identifying barriers and fostering more inclusion
- Culture around disabilities
- Bureaucratic infrastructure and red tape
- No accessible transportation on weekends and evenings

After identifying these challenges, teams discussed potential solutions. They were asked to think about how they would include people with disabilities and older adults in the planning & operation of their solutions, what partnerships they could draw on or create to implement this solution, what kinds of resources they would need, and how they could utilize assistive technology in their solutions. Some of their proposed solutions included:

- Create coalitions to increase coordination
 - Form steering committees



- Pressure bureaucracy through equity workgroups
- Experiential learning simulations
- Pursue partnerships with faith-based organizations and colleges
- Maintain outreach through phone and flyers for people who are not as tech savvy
- Increase outreach to young people through TikTok and YouTube, as young people will be crucial for accessibility in the future
- Track data for transit agencies

INSIDE A BREAKOUT GROUP: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING SIMULATIONS

After lunch, attendees split up into the different affinity groups they had come to represent, such as older adults, public transportation, and caregivers. In the group representing people with disabilities, two of the attendees came up with an idea to help policymakers understand what it's like to use public transit with a disability.

The attendees reasoned that policymakers should be asked to use public transit with a simulated disability – in a wheelchair, with a blindfold, or with weights to mimic invisible illnesses – in the hopes that this activity would spur policymakers into action around accessibility. This initial suggestion sparked the group's discussion on accessibility, inclusion, and transportation, and several of the group members brought the idea back to their team discussions.

FOCUSING YOUR GOALS – Western Connecticut & St. Louis

As the team from Western Connecticut discussed many accessibility challenges, they worked together to narrow their discussion to three challenges: recruitment, communication, and inclusion. In their presentation, the team explained their solutions clearly and concisely: work with faith-based and college organizations to promote driver recruitment; explore new communication avenues while still maintaining older modes of communication; and create an advisory committee to foster inclusion. Since the Institute, the team has formulated a plan to discuss strategies for surveying trending transportation issues at a statewide transportation committee.

At the Institute, the team from St. Louis also decided to focus on three challenges: communication, culture around disability, and infrastructure / navigating red tape. At a follow up meeting, they came up with concrete steps to follow through with these goals. They planned to meet with the Bi-State Development Board of Commissioners and brought up recent changes to the ADA Paratransit service area and inclusion of the disability community in transit planning. They also planned steps to reformat the ADA Advisory Committee, train self-advocates, and explore state-wide partnerships.



WORKING THROUGH BARRIERS – Seattle, Washington

One issue that the Seattle team brought up was crosswalks where the stripes had gotten too high. The crosswalks were painted again and again, until the height of the paint had become a challenge for navigating the crosswalk. As the team explored ways to address this, one member of the team used their planning experience to explain that capital projects are ranked according to a number of factors, and crosswalk improvements would automatically trigger curb improvements. Their proposal couldn't just be about crosswalks. Through their discussion, they realized that their ideas fit with Seattle's Vision Zero Plan around pedestrian safety, and decided to utilize that as a way forward.

Since the Institute, the team has planned to use their new partnership with the Seattle Rideshare Driver's Association through one of their team members to disseminate information to rideshare drivers about how to safely pick up passengers. The team also decided to ask the King County Metro Equity Cabinet to elevate concerns over accessible signage and to advocate for more accessible and human-centered approaches for informing the Seattle Department of Transportation about needed infrastructure improvements.

TRANSPORTATION COALITIONS – Maine & Utah

York County, Maine decided to create a transportation equity work group, with the hopes of engaging the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission and the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS). They are also interested in expanding access to lift-equipped vehicles.

The team from Utah also planned to initiate a transportation coalition, with participation from consumers, and to conduct a statewide study to identify all transportation providers, what services they provide, and identify gaps and solutions. They hope to do stakeholder group studies in each region to gain the perspective of consumers.

COORDINATION – North Texas & Oklahoma

When the North Texas team presented on their challenges and solutions, they noted that their major barrier was coordination among different agencies and regions. Programs can't cross county or local lines, so some places end up with no transportation at all.

Charlie Dickson, a member of the TP4A team, told the North Texas team that when he had visited northern Texas 12 years ago, their main problem had been coordination then too. As the North Texas team explained their plan for increasing coordination across the state, they pledged that through their work and new partnerships, they wouldn't be in the same place after 12 more years.



When Oklahoma presented their plans a few moments later, they repeated the same problems – a lack of coordination between the many agencies serving rural and urban areas. The Oklahoma team was hopeful that a new mobility management office at the OKDOT would help, and left with a plan to meet again.

IMPLEMENTING SOLUTIONS – Grand Rapids, Minnesota

As the final team to present, Grand Rapids concluded the Institute with an example of using partnerships and technology to solve issues in accessible transportation. The team from Grand Rapids shared a solution that they had already implemented as a pilot project in their community – autonomous vehicles for accessible transportation. The goMARTI self-driving shuttle allowed the Grand Rapids transit system to expand their accessible transportation hours to weekends and evenings. To learn more about the project, visit the [goMARTI website](#).

Transit Planning 4 All is a transportation planning project focused on promoting inclusive planning. TP4A is a partnership between the Administration for Community Living, the Community Transportation Association of America, USAging, the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston, and DJB Evaluation Consulting.

