

People with disabilities and older adults face multiple barriers to accessing transportation. We can improve accessible transportation by designing accessible transit options using inclusive transit planning. The [Transit Planning for All project](#) (TP4A) highlights the important work being done to meaningfully include and amplify the voices of older adults and people with disabilities in transit planning. From 2013 to 2022, TP4A funded a series of [pilot transit planning projects](#) across the nation that used inclusive planning processes to improve local transit services in their communities. Among the findings from these projects, was that partnerships with older adults and people with disabilities are key to the success of inclusive transit planning initiatives. The [Pathway to Inclusion](#) was used to guide and measure the level of inclusiveness of the planning processes. These partnerships ultimately lead to improvements in transit program planning, operations, and services for people with disabilities and older adults.

Background

In May 2022, TP4A launched a virtual roundtable series with representatives from its demonstration projects to discuss lessons learned to date. **Roundtable #2: Lessons Learned on Communication for Inclusive Transit Planning** featured Staci Sahoo of Hopelink in Washington and Karen Estes of Knoxville Knox Area Community Action Committee in Tennessee. In her work, Staci Sahoo improves mobility opportunities for people with disabilities and older adults, including Travel Training / Orientation & Mobility Workshops. In her role as the Director of Transportation, Karen has worked to ensure that the transportation system is fully accessible for people with disabilities and older adults. She plays a key role on the Knox County Community Action Committee and leads the “Meeting in a Box” initiative that reached people with disabilities and older adults in the places they live, work, and play. We reference excerpts from the roundtable discussion as examples throughout this brief.

This brief is a part of *Inclusive Transportation Planning Lessons Learned*, a 4-part brief series sponsored by the Transit Planning 4 All project. The briefs present key tips for enhancing inclusion through partnering with people with disabilities and older adults throughout the transit planning process. [Read other briefs in this series on the Transit Planning 4 All website, including:](#)

- » [Partnerships](#)
- » [Engagement](#)
- » [Measuring Success](#)



Staci Sahoo and community members at a Mobility for All summit.

Planning for Accessible Marketing and Outreach

Accessible marketing and outreach strategies are key to reaching and meaningfully engaging as many people as possible to have the greatest impact. It is especially critical to include people with all types of disabilities, such as those with auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech, and visual disabilities. One key aspect of accessible marketing and outreach is ensuring that websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, and engage.

Accessible marketing and outreach also benefit people without disabilities who face barriers to active participation (e.g., people with slow internet connection, smart phone users, older adults with changing abilities, people with situational limitations, and people with temporary disabilities). We must design inclusive programs and engagement strategies that every individual can easily access, regardless of disability.

“Our region has been very thoughtful by not only providing food as an incentive, but asking what we need to do to get other needs met. How do you find childcare? How do you fund transportation? We had on our flyer, ‘Do you need a ride there?’ when we were promoting a world café. We intentionally asked, ‘What other accommodations do you need?’”

–Staci Sahoo, Hopelink

Establishing a Consistent Feedback Loop

Establishing a consistent feedback loop during transit planning is of utmost importance, especially when it comes to promoting inclusion for people with disabilities and older adults. By actively involving community members in the planning process, transportation planners can gain invaluable insights into their unique needs, challenges, and preferences related to transit systems. This inclusive approach ensures that the voices of often marginalized communities are heard, and their concerns are taken into account, leading to the development of more accessible and accommodating transportation solutions.

Furthermore, by incorporating feedback, transit planners can identify and address barriers and gaps in the existing transit infrastructure. This could include considerations such as the availability of wheelchair-accessible vehicles, appropriately designed facilities, and clear signage and wayfinding systems. By developing a consistent and two-way communication loop, planners can better understand their mobility requirements and work toward creating an inclusive transit system that enables them to travel safely, comfortably, and independently. It also enables transit planners to be responsive to the needs of people with disabilities and older adults as communities change and continuous improvements are needed for enhanced accessibility and inclusivity.

Meeting People Where They Are

To meet the ultimate goals of improving outcomes for entire communities and creating transportation systems that are fully responsive to community needs, the process of inclusion should involve a variety of ways for citizens to make decisions at the individual, group, and community-wide levels. The “Meeting in a Box” approach used by the Knoxville Community Action

“Getting to know people in their homes and places they frequented to better communicate helped a lot with trust, engagement, and understanding.”

–Staci Sahoo, Hopelink

Committee, for example, offers a promising strategy for promoting inclusive transit planning. By employing this method, transportation agencies and organizations can ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are included in the decision-making process.

The “Meeting in a Box” concept revolves around providing individuals or groups with a comprehensive package containing materials, instructions, and resources necessary to hold their own meetings and discussions on transit planning. This approach eliminates traditional barriers to participation, such as time constraints, geographic limitations, or accessibility concerns. It empowers marginalized communities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups to actively engage in shaping transit policies and infrastructure. By leveraging the “Meeting in a Box” approach, inclusive transit planning becomes more democratic, enabling a broader range of voices to be heard and considered, ultimately leading to transportation systems that better serve people with disabilities and older adults.

“I would say since we took the meetings to the individuals, we still met them on their own terms. They were there, and they were willing to share because we were coming for their feedback, for questions, [and] for solutions rather than telling them what had already been decided for them.”

–Karen Estes, Knox County CAC, on their “Meeting in a Box” approach

Key Lessons in Communication for Inclusive Transit Planning

In conclusion, establishing a consistent feedback loop during transit planning is vital for promoting inclusion for people with disabilities and older adults. By actively engaging with key collaborators within communities, planners can gather insights, address barriers, and adapt services to meet their unique needs. Projects funded by TP4A also identified the following tips to ensure consistent and meaningful communication with community members during the transit planning process:

- Frequency and type of communication is essential for maintaining successful partnerships with community advisory groups ([King County](#)).
- It is vitally important to keep all partners informed and engaged as coordinated transportation planning moves forward ([Lewis and Clark County](#)).
- It is critical to maintain a strong base of communication with all members of the core group and the community-at-large. It is crucial to stay in communication with committee members between meetings and to keep them informed of progress and achievements. And, if progress is stagnant, do not be afraid to explain the reasons why ([Alaska Mobility Coalition](#)).



Photo of “Hokey Pokey” Day as part of Knox County Community Action Committee’s community engagement efforts.

- Establish regular communication with project teams and the general public. Options include hosting a website and creating an electric news list ([United Way VT](#)).
- Provide materials in multiple formats, and don't assume everyone has internet access. Some materials need to be hard copied and then mailed or delivered ([Rabbit Transit](#)).
- Use a variety of communications channels, including face-to-face meetings, electronic communications, and telephone calls to keep members informed. One project even engaged a graphic artist to illustrate the discussion of a community group ([Jewish Council for the Aging](#)).
- In doing outreach with seniors and people with disabilities, it is important to remember that you will have to adapt the approach you take to meet the specific needs of each group. This will involve using different forms of communication, including creative verbal and non-verbal communication techniques ([Knoxville-Knox County CAC](#)).
- Respectful listening is key to building relationships that will last way beyond project completion ([Ride Connection](#)).
- Sharing stories should be a priority. Our advocates have strong voices and can advocate for their independence ([PEAC](#)).
- There should be balance between reaching many people and going deep into conversations with people ([Mountain Line](#)).
- Expand community dialogue on “age-friendly” and “disability-friendly” work and activism ([Evanston](#)).

References

GPCOG, P. A. (2019). INCLUSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING TOOLKIT. Retrieved from <https://transitplanning4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PACTS-Inclusive-Transportation-Planning-Toolkit-2019-1.pdf>



Transit Planning 4 All is an inclusive and coordinated transportation-planning project that has funded a series of pilot projects across the nation, each seeking to increase inclusion in transportation planning and services for people with disabilities and older adults.

The project is a partnership of the Administration for Community Living (ACL), the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston, and DJB Evaluation Consulting Group.

The project is sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living.