

# Accessible Transportation



## Why Is Accessible Transportation Important?

Accessible transportation, whether by car, bus, plane, or sidewalk, is transportation that may be used by everyone – with or without disabilities. Transportation is essential to access employment, education, health care, services, and other life-sustaining essentials. “Meaningful access” has yet to be concretely defined in federal statute which leaves much of our nation’s current infrastructure and practice around transportation disjointed, incomplete, or absent for most people with disabilities in the United States. Lack of adequate transportation leads to isolation, poor health outcomes, unemployment or underemployment, and an inequitable life, especially in rural communities where there are fewer public resources.

## Factors Contributing to the Lack of Accessible Transportation

**There is little research to quantify the lack of accessible transportation and how it affects the daily lives of people with disabilities. This makes it difficult for planners and policymakers to know the best way to make transportation more inclusive for people with disabilities**

### ***The ADA Predates Innovations in Transportation and Does Not Apply to Air Travel***

- Accessible public transportation in urban areas includes limited space for wheelchair users. For example, MetroTransit in the Twin Cities designates 2 spaces per accessible bus. If the designated spaces are already in use, wheelchair users often must wait for the next scheduled bus. (1)
- Rideshare hailing companies like Uber and Lyft as well as taxi companies continue to fight against complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act and their accessibility is woefully lacking. (2)
- Transportation agencies and non-emergency medical transportation providers often partner with ridesharing companies to provide efficient in-demand transportation to ambulatory riders while wheelchair users continue to rely upon the traditional paratransit next-day services. (3)
- Websites and apps for making reservations for transportation services are not accessible and do not meet current accessibility standards, especially for people with low-vision or blindness. Additionally, people with disabilities are often required to call to get information, make reservations, or get a discount.
- It is dangerous for people with disabilities who use mobility devices such as wheelchairs to travel by air. Many are injured, equipment is frequently damaged, and some have died as a result of unsafe conditions.
- Self-driving or autonomous vehicles are not currently designed for accessibility.

### ***Obstructed Public Sidewalks and Paths Make Non-Motorist Travel Difficult and/or Dangerous***

- *Snow removal rules and enforcement vary by municipality, and information about them is often difficult to find.*(4)
- *Scooter and E-bike rentals services contracts with municipalities often exempt them from enforcement of rules and laws about keeping sidewalks and paths clear, therefore there is nothing the municipality can do about abandoned equipment blocking sidewalks and paths.*

**According to Minnesota Compass, a project of Wilder Research, 49% of Minnesotans who identify as having a disability live in rural locations.**

- Low density and scattered housing make it difficult to run fixed-route public transportation systems efficiently.
- Public transportation in rural Minnesota is limited to mostly dial-a-ride services which generally operate between 7 AM – 6 PM weekdays, often provide next-day service, and do not cross county lines which limits access to employment, healthcare, and retailers.(5)

## Previous Programs and Policies

- A partnership between Minnesota Department of Transportation, City of Grand Rapids, The PLUM Catalyst, May Mobility, Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation, Itasca County, Via, University of Minnesota, Arrowhead Transit, and Mobility Mania called go MARTI (Minnesota's Autonomous Rural Transit Initiative) is piloting the use of autonomous and accessible transportation option for residents and visitors in Grand Rapids, MN through Spring 2024.(6)
- In 2019 Dakota County's Transit Coordination Assistance Project partnered with Lyft to reduce barriers for older adults and residents with disabilities. More than 750 individuals were part of the program as of July 2021, averaging 19 trips each month. 81% of riders reported that Lyft has reduced their transportation barriers. (7)
- In June 2023 Delta flight products in partnership with Air4All revealed a new airplane seat design that would allow wheelchair users to remain in their own chair during flights. This is just a prototype and is expected to take at least 18 months to be commercially available. (8)
- Traverse City, MI partners with businesses near bus stops to clear snow and maintain accessibility of the bus stop all winter. Sponsorship of individual bus stops is documented on the transit authority's website. (4)

## Policy Recommendations

We recommend and support the following solutions and urge policymakers to consider using multiple approaches as the current systemic need is complex and long overdue:

- Provide funding to research the need for accessible transportation in both urban and rural areas.
- Involve people with disabilities as decisionmakers in the process and design of solutions.
- Increase the number and availability of accessible vehicles in the private transportation industry. This includes rideshare hailing services, taxis, car rental, shuttle services, limousines, boats, and bike rentals.
- Implement and enforce accessibility standards for websites and apps used to make transportation reservations.
- Create incentives for businesses to invest in accessible transportation to encourage companies to make the necessary changes to provide equitable services to people with disabilities.
- Foster collaboration between stakeholders such as disability rights organizations, federally funded agencies, and private transportation providers to expand accessible transportation and allow people with disabilities to travel safely and independently.

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(2) **DRCNH:** <https://drcnh.org/rap-sheet/ridesharing-and-the-ada/>

(3) **Duluth NewsTribune:** <https://www.duluthnewtribune.com/news/minnesota/we-cant-take-it-anymore-vulnerable-minnesotans-left-without-options-after-companies-drop-medicaid-rides>

(4) **Minnesota Council on Disability:** <https://www.disability.state.mn.us/technical-assistance/snow-removal/>

(5) **Minnesota Department of Transportation:** <https://minnesotago.org/final-plans/gmtip-draft-plan-2/chapter-3>

(6) **goMart:** [www.goMARTI.com](http://www.goMARTI.com)

(7) **Minnesota Council on Transportation Access:** <https://coordinatemntransit.org/news/2022/march/tncpartnerships>

(8) **FastCompany:** <https://www.fastcompany.com/90906945/airplanes-accessible-delta-products>