

# Travel Training: Avenue to Public Transit

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The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 mandates significant changes in the way transportation services for people with disabilities are provided. As in other areas of the country, fixed-route operators in the San Francisco Bay Area are now required to assume new levels of responsibility in overseeing both fixed-route and paratransit services. A basic premise guiding the regulations that interpret the law is that once a transit system becomes fully accessible, people with disabilities who are capable of using the system will use it. The law requires that each new vehicle purchased be equipped with a lift but recognizes that other factors contribute to a fully accessible system. Many people who have been unable to use public transit will now be able to do so because it will be accessible. For others, fear or lack of knowledge about the system may have prevented use of transit in the past, even though they may have been able to use it. From the operator's and the trainer's points of view, ways to tap this potential ridership and establish training programs that respond to the needs of operators and to the people with disabilities that they serve will be explored.

In 1990 the Cerenio Management Group (CMG), of San Francisco, was awarded a training grant from Project ACTION (a federally funded program that sponsors demonstration projects to promote accessible transportation); recently it was successfully completed. Through the project, people with disabilities were trained to teach others with disabilities how to use fixed-route accessible service and to work with transit personnel so that transit personnel can better serve people with disabilities.

This paper will discuss the way trainers were recruited and selected, the curriculum designed for training, the goals and objectives of the program, and the results of the project. The paper will point out the effectiveness of using local resources within the disability community to provide training that may enable people with disabilities to use public transit.

## BACKGROUND

Within in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, 23 transit operators are responsible for implementing the paratransit provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). These agencies operate in rural, urban, and suburban communities and offer a variety of fixed-route bus, light rail, rapid rail, and ferryboat services to the public. The vast majority of these services are accessible, but the provision of paratransit is a new responsibility for most operators, one that is a significant additional expense.

Currently, consistency is lacking among programs in the determination of paratransit eligibility, which has restricted interjurisdictional travel for paratransit consumers. To overcome this obstacle, the local metropolitan transportation planning organization, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, has initiated an effort with the region's operators and disability communities to establish regionwide criteria for ADA paratransit eligibility.

Efforts are under way to develop these criteria and to establish an eligibility process that will respond to the requirements of the ADA consistently throughout the region. A task force consisting of consumers with disabilities, paratransit providers, and transit operators is providing guidance for the project.

## ROLE OF TRAVEL TRAINING

An overriding principle in establishing regional eligibility is the role of travel training in the eligibility process. Consumers and operators alike recognize the benefits of travel training; therefore, travel training is expected to be an integral part of the ADA paratransit eligibility system.

Unlike eligibility for some current paratransit systems, eligibility for paratransit under the ADA is not based solely on the existence of an applicant's disability. Instead, eligibility will be based on the individual's functional ability to use accessible fixed-route transit. The ADA assumes that most of those with disabilities will be able to use a public transit system once it is fully accessible.

Traditionally, an "accessible" vehicle has been one with a lift and securements to accommodate people in wheelchairs. The ADA clearly acknowledges that an accessible system is not achieved simply by adding a lift to a bus. For the first time, it is recognized that other features are necessary to achieve full accessibility. For example, transit systems are required to make public information readily available and drivers are required to call out stops. Such requirements may enable people to navigate a system that they previously could not.

In the Bay Area, as in other parts of the county, careful scrutiny and assessment will occur before paratransit eligibility is established. As part of the process, an applicant will be judged as to whether he or she is an appropriate candidate for training. In some cases, it may be determined that for at least some trips, with travel training, the applicant can use fixed-route service and is therefore not eligible for paratransit.

Even though transit vehicles and systems will be fully accessible, some people may be reluctant to use fixed-route transit—especially those who were previously able to access paratransit. Provision of training can enable a disabled person

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to use fixed-route transit, which is more cost-effective for the operator than providing paratransit.

### NEED FOR GUIDELINES FOR TRAVEL TRAINING

In theory the merits of travel training are accepted, but most transit agencies in the region do not offer such services and are not sure how to begin a program. Furthermore, some perceive barriers (e.g., costs and liability) or are not aware of community resources that may be useful to them. Guidelines should be established for transit operators that wish to implement travel training programs and to use existing resources. In addition, there is a need to promote travel training for potential trainees.

### CMG PROJECT ACTION GRANT

In 1991 Project ACTION funded CMG to conduct a two-phase training project to certify people with disabilities as sensitivity trainers for transit personnel and trainers of transit consumers with disabilities. The experiences and lessons learned from this project can serve as a model for transit properties throughout not only the Bay Area but the entire country.

The goals of the project were to develop

- A training program in which transit users with disabilities are certified as sensitivity trainers for fixed-route and paratransit personnel,
- A training program in which transit users with disabilities are certified as trainers of transit users with disabilities on how to use fixed-route and paratransit services effectively, and
- A sensitivity teachers training manual; the first section should train transit personnel and the second section should train transit users with disabilities on how to use the transportation network. The manual is entitled *TRANSFER: A Training Manual To Support Accessible Transit Systems for Persons with Disabilities*.

### DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Key tasks were as follows:

1. Select trainees,
2. Develop sensitivity materials,
3. Develop training techniques,
4. Conduct training program,
5. Provide transportation personnel training,
6. Develop user materials,
7. Provide user training,
8. Certify trainers, and
9. Produce training manual.

Selecting trainees was an extensive process; it was based on screening applications and panel interviews. Out of 18 applicants, 15 were interviewed and 13 selected to participate by early June. The proposed goal was to have half of the

trainees from San Francisco and half from other Bay Area counties. Of selected trainees, five were from San Francisco, five were from the East Bay (Oakland/Richmond), one was from the South Bay (San Mateo County), and one was from the North Bay (Marin County).

From this experience, it is recommended that a larger pool of applicants and trainees be targeted because of turnover. Of the 13 persons chosen to participate, 3 left the program during classroom training and 3 were unable to complete the field-training requirements. All of the reasons for leaving were due to disability. To plan and compensate for this attrition rate, select a larger group of trainees.

For each of the certified trainees, travel was one of many goals to be accomplished on a personal level. Independent travel was a part of a larger life plan; each person was already functioning independently in other parts of his or her life. Each person was able and willing to request assistance if needed.

More than 20 field training sessions were conducted by trainees and master trainers for transit personnel of fixed-route and paratransit providers. To implement field training, trainees were responsible for making their own travel arrangements—as well as those for other members on the training team—on accessible public transit to training sites throughout the Bay Area. Master trainers and trainees provided sensitivity training for fixed-route transit, van, and taxi operators and for social agencies that serve the disabled.

Field training was divided into levels of mastery. Each trainee had to receive a passing evaluation before proceeding to the next level. The first level consisted of observation by master trainers and peers. The second level consisted of team training with a master trainer. Then each trainee was required to team teach with their peers. The training was conducted with transit operators and, to the extent possible, under real-life conditions.

In CMG's team teaching, each trainer is responsible for knowing all aspects of the training but not necessarily for teaching all of them. In an actual training situation, someone with a disability should have a backup trainer, since his or her health condition may fluctuate daily. The trainees were trained to be prepared to provide training under "real" conditions, in which flexibility is a key part of successful training.

Finally, a training manual was produced for replication; it was based on the actual training program.

### INTERACTION WITH TRANSIT AGENCIES

An important part of this project was to conduct training for transit agency personnel. When field training was scheduled, no transit companies requested travel training for customers, although it was offered. The transit agencies were not prepared; they had no program or staff to perform these functions. The transit agencies that had accessible services were not ready to cooperate in providing joint travel training or already had set travel training and trainer programs.

Despite these obstacles, travel training was provided to all Project ACTION trainees as an inherent part of their field training. Trainers arranged their own transportation using fixed-route or paratransit service to provide training sessions throughout the Bay Area. Arranging their own travel, either in groups or alone, was part of the travel training education

and was encouraged by master trainers. The travel training that did occur was in excess of the two 4-hr sessions required.

To implement travel training at a transit agency, some recommendations follow:

- Transit agencies need to recognize the importance of soliciting the participation of transit consumers with disabilities in training, as trainers or as trainees.
- Transit agency representatives must be involved as part of the training process; they can be involved in many aspects: policy, procedures, funding, marketing, and so forth.
- The input of disabled transit consumers in the training process must be an integral part of the transit agency procedure.
- A suggested training manual is *TRANSFER*, which was designed for use nationwide by any person or transit agency interested in providing sensitivity or mobility training.

Some transit officials have supported the project since its inception. Both appointed and elected officials attended the graduation or sent letters of commendation and acknowledgment to trainees with disabilities when they completed their training program.

Since completion of the project, interested parties around the country have asked for information, lists of the certified trainers with disabilities for consultation, and copies of the training manual; they also want to discuss possible future projects.

For travel training to succeed in the transit agency organization, the philosophy of accessible transit for all must filter from management throughout the organization. Access must be reflected in policies, funding decisions, training programs for all personnel, marketing plans, fare structure incentives, and active community input.

## POSTTRAINING ASSESSMENT

Participation in Project ACTION was a meaningful experience for the trainees. Besides the actual training, it increased a sense of self-worth and belonging in all trainees, who came from various backgrounds and levels of education. For several members, even speaking out in a group was a new and fright-

ening experience. Tremendous gains were made and friendships nurtured during the program.

Many of the participants have returned to their respective transit providers with a determined sense of cooperative purpose and have increased their level of voluntarism as citizen participants on transit advisory committees for fixed-route, paratransit, and ADA implementation.

Graduates of the project now face some practical problems when arranging to conduct training. Because Project ACTION trainers have disabilities themselves, sometimes they do not have the personal or economic support necessary to arrange, coordinate, and conduct training sessions without help. Although team training has always been emphasized as an option, the backup support in most cases is beyond what they can provide to each other.

CMG is responsible for deciding person by person what these trainers need to enable them to function as practicable and effective trainers. An option would be to explore peer training, recruiting older adults (seniors) with transferable training skills and giving them the necessary content to co-teach training sessions. These able-bodied seniors would provide the backup logistical support for the trainer. They would assist the trainer and possess sufficient knowledge to carry on the class if the trainer needed a break.

## CONCLUSION

Each community is different, especially as far as its resources available to conduct training projects. Some common issues exist, however, despite different approaches to implementing the ADA and diverse geographic or cultural situations.

For the most part, transit operators now lack guidelines for establishing programs to conduct travel training for passengers with disabilities who may be capable of using fixed-route transit with appropriate training. This paper has identified some potential barriers and outlined the needs from the perspective of the transit provider and has discussed a model program that links the potential resources of trainers to the need for operators to establish training programs.

It is useful to consider transit consumers with disabilities as resources for the transit agency—in providing input to the content of any transit education program, in considering their marketing suggestions, and in working with the transit agency to sell the accessible system to their peers.