

Research Brief

TCRP Report 163: Strategy Guide to Enable and Promote the Use of Fixed-Route Transit by People with Disabilities

Overview of the Approach Suggested in the Strategy Guide

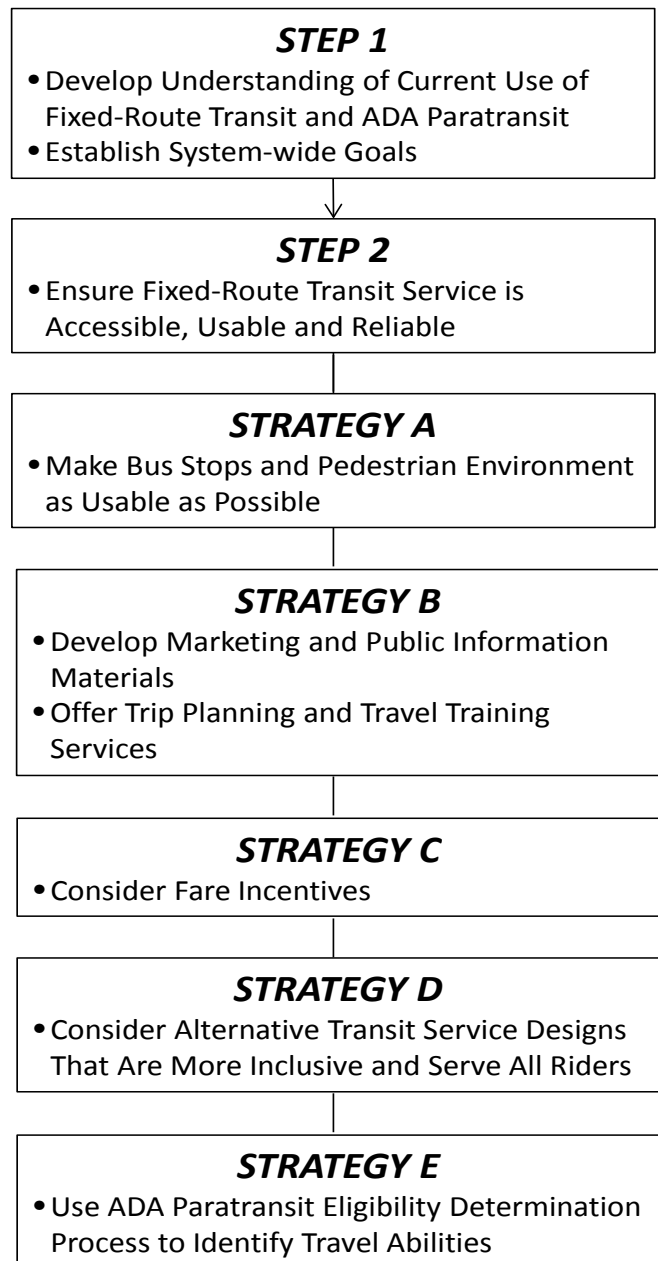
Developing an appropriate balance between accessible fixed-route transit services and complementary paratransit services has been one of the most challenging aspects of implementing the transportation provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Despite significant improvements in the accessibility of bus and rail transit systems, demand for complementary paratransit service, which was envisioned as a safety net for people with disabilities who could not use fixed-route transit, has increased from about 15 million rides per year in 1991 to an estimated 67 million rides per year in 2008.

Enabling and promoting the use of fixed-route transit benefits both riders with disabilities and the transit industry. Unlike complementary paratransit, which typically requires trips to be reserved the prior day, fixed-route transit allows for spontaneous travel and is far more flexible in meeting immediate travel needs. It is also less costly, with fares typically half of what is charged for complementary paratransit—and sometimes even less with reduced or free fare incentive programs. For transit agencies, the cost differences are also significant. Trips can be provided on fixed-route transit at a fraction of the cost of complementary paratransit.

Suggested Approach

The suggested approach for enabling and promoting the use of fixed-route transit by people with disabilities starts with two important “first steps.” Several strategy options can then be considered.

Suggested Approach



STEP 1. Develop an Understanding of the Current Use of Fixed-Route Transit and ADA Paratransit and Set System-wide Goals.

Develop an understanding of current use of all transit services by people with disabilities. Gather data on current fixed-route use as well as ADA paratransit use. This will provide an important baseline of information that can help to assess the success of future efforts. Adopt a system-wide policy on transit accessibility to ensure that the entire organization is working toward the same end of enabling and promoting greater use of fixed-route transit services by people with disabilities.

Set goals not just for total fixed-route transit ridership, but for ridership by people with disabilities. Track ridership each year and use it as part of the performance evaluation of services and managers.

The **Corpus Christi (TX) Regional Transportation Authority (CCRTA)**, widely recognized for its accessible transit services, adopted a system-wide accessibility policy in 2011. The policy calls for all transit agency employees and departments to establish a commitment to accessible services. It also creates a Universal Access Team, with representatives from each CCRTA department, that meets monthly to review progress and set direction for needed changes.

STEP 2. Ensure That Fixed-Route Service is Accessible, Usable, and Reliable

Evaluate and monitor fixed-route transit services to ensure full compliance with ADA requirements. This includes buying vehicles that meet the ADA vehicle accessibility requirements, ensuring access to new or altered transit facilities, maintaining equipment in good working condition, providing back-up service if there are in-service failures, announcing stops and identifying routes, and training employees to proficiency.

Reach-Through Panel Designed by Golden Empire Transit (Photo courtesy of GET)



Beyond the minimum requirements, consider additional efforts to make fixed-route transit services as usable as possible. Work with riders with disabilities to improve the interior design of vehicles. Consider the latest advancements in lift, ramp, and securement technology. **Golden Empire Transit District (GET)** in Bakersfield, CA developed a “reach-through” for its buses to make the wheelchair securement process easier for drivers and riders.

Once these important first steps have been taken, there are several types of efforts and programs that can be considered. These strategies can be pursued separately or simultaneously.

STRATEGY A – Improve Bus Stop and Pedestrian Infrastructure Accessibility

A survey of almost 2,000 people with disabilities conducted as part of the study found that access to and from bus stops was the most important factor in determining whether or not they could use fixed-route transit. Implement programs and efforts to enable people with disabilities to get

to fixed-route transit stops and stations and board accessible vehicles. This includes making bus stops accessible and working with local, regional and state agencies to make the pedestrian infrastructure in the area of stops accessible. **RideOn in Montgomery County, MD**, made improvements to over 2,500 of its 5,000+ bus stops. The improvements were made not only to improve access to bus stops, but to improve pedestrian safety for all riders.

Montgomery County RideOn Bus Stop Improvement, Before and After

(Photo courtesy of KFH Group)



STRATEGY B – Develop Marketing and Public Information Materials and Provide Trip Planning and Travel Training Services

Provide people with disabilities information about using fixed-route transit services. This includes public information and marketing materials, as well as trip planning services. It also includes providing travel training to those who are interested. **TriMet in Portland, OR**, enhanced its online trip planner to provide information about the accessibility of bus stops as well as aerial and street-level photographs of stops.

Intercity Transit in Olympia, WA, provides a variety of free travel training services that are designed to meet the individual needs of riders. One full-time Travel Trainer provides instruction on riding transit with a mobility device, specific origin-to-destination trip planning and training, and orientation to all aspects of bus travel. Data from Intercity Transit suggests that about 17,000 trips per year are made on fixed-route transit, rather than ADA paratransit, as a direct result of travel training services.

Intercity Transit’s Travel Training efforts in 2012 cost \$83,324 and saved an estimated \$668,100 from trips taken on fixed-route transit rather than ADA paratransit.

Estimated Free Fare Program Annual Savings (with Conservative Trip Diversion Assumptions)

City (Transit Agency)	Estimated Savings
Fort Worth, TX (the T)	\$1,671,933
Boston, MA (MBTA)	\$9,186,508
San Mateo, CA (SamTrans)	\$2,468,864
Salt Lake City, UT (UTA)	\$1,300,333

STRATEGY C – Consider Fare Incentives

Encourage increased use of fixed-route transit through fare incentives. In particular, consider offering free fares on fixed-route transit services to people with disabilities. A survey of 163 transit agencies identified 36 agencies that had implemented free fare programs for riders with disabilities. An analysis of seven selected programs indicated significant savings from

trips taken on fixed-route transit rather than ADA paratransit, even with conservative assumptions about the percent of free fare rides that were diverted.

STRATEGY D – Consider Transit Service Designs That Are More Inclusive

This includes flex-route services, community bus services, paratransit-to-fixed-route feeder services, and general public dial-a-ride services. Each of these designs serve all riders in an integrated way. Working together with local communities, **Broward County Transit (BCT) in Ft. Lauderdale, FL**, has developed a network of 20 community bus services that supplement the regional bus network. With shorter walking distances to stops, the community bus services are more usable by all riders. These local services also feed into the regional bus network and have helped BCT streamline its regional routes. **SamTrans in San Mateo County, CA**, operates a general public demand responsive service in more rural parts of its service area that also meets ADA paratransit requirements in that area. In 2012, 4,443 trips for general public riders were provided together with 25,044 ADA paratransit trips.

STRATEGY E – Use the ADA Paratransit Eligibility Determination Process to Encourage and Promote Use of Fixed-Route Transit

The eligibility determination process can be used to identify the abilities of riders to use fixed-route transit services. Conditions under which fixed-route transit can be used can be identified as part of the process. Determinations can also be made about individual trips—whether trips can be made by fixed-route transit or if complementary paratransit is needed. Information about accessible fixed-route transit services can be provided to individuals who can sometimes use bus or rail services. The eligibility determination process can also link persons who are interested in greater use of fixed-route transit services to available travel training services.

Use the ADA paratransit eligibility process as a way to identify abilities rather than limitations. Make it a goal of the process to assist individuals in identifying all accessible transit options.

While any one of the above strategy options can be implemented, research suggests that transit agencies can improve their success in encouraging fixed-route transit service by using and integrating multiple efforts. Transit agencies are encouraged to consider all of the above strategies and adopt a holistic, complete approach for encouraging and facilitating use of fixed-route transit services.

Information in this Research Brief was taken from *TCRP Report 163: Strategy Guide to Enable and Promote the Use of Fixed-Route Transit by People with Disabilities*. The overall approach and strategy suggested in the report is described. More information about the suggested strategy, as well as the specific approaches used, is contained in *TCRP Report 163*. Copies of the report are available from TRB by going to www.trb.org.