

Transportation Equity: Ensure Access to All Modes of Transportation

BACKGROUND

United Spinal Association has dedicated its energy and programs to improving the quality of life for Americans with disabilities and advancing their independence. People with disabilities rely on transportation, traditional and alternative modes, to travel to their jobs and appointments, participate and contribute in their social and religious communities, visit family members, participate in exercise, and, most significantly, live independently in the setting they choose.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), the Air Carrier Access Act (1986), and Rehabilitation Act (1973) all provided groundbreaking access to transportation, including airlines, public buses and subways, curb ramps and accessible sidewalks. All of these measures ensure a floor, not a ceiling. **People with disabilities, especially those living in rural areas, continue to lack access to transportation.** Adults with disabilities are more than twice as likely as those without disabilities to have inadequate transportation (31 percent versus 13 percent). According to the US Census Bureau, in 2012, only 33% of working age people with disabilities living in the community were employed. Nearly 30% live in poverty. **Inadequate access to transportation creates barriers to employment, contributing to high unemployment and poverty rates.**

ADA and Rehabilitation Act enforcement can be challenging. **Cities or rural areas may not be in compliance with existing rules, or may have difficulty maintaining infrastructure.** Many people with disabilities may find themselves rolling down the street or staying home because of a misplaced curb ramp, too narrow or uneven sidewalks, obstructions like telephone poles, or unplowed snow. Lack of accessible infrastructure and transit effectively bar many people with disabilities who do not own cars from connecting to transportation modes that many take for granted.

Ill-maintained and inaccessible infrastructure can also result in serious injury. Pedestrian and bicycle fatalities rose from 12% to nearly 16% of all traffic deaths for the past three years. In addition, children with disabilities are more than five times more likely to be hit by a motor vehicle as a pedestrian or bicyclist than children without disabilities. **Complete streets policies are being adopted across the country**, requiring transportation projects to consider the safety and convenience of all users, including pedestrian and bicyclists, children, older adults, and people with disabilities. **The US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Mayor's Challenge for Safer People, Safer Streets poses challenges to cities for the year, including ensuring ADA compliance and addressing barriers to make streets safe and accessible for wheelchair users.**

Funding and authorization for all federal surface transportation programs, including safety programs and public transit, is at risk. MAP-21 expired on May 31st. In addition, the nation's Highway Trust Fund, used to pay for road and transit projects, faces a shortfall yet again. **Congress has an opportunity to pass a new surface transportation bill that could improve and fund: public transit; ADA compliance (including accessible Amtrak stations and boarding, and sidewalk, transit stop and public rights-of-way maintenance); access to employment in transportation; and programs that provide connectivity across modes of transportation and to jobs, schools, grocery stores, accessible housing, and that ensure transportation equity for all.**

REQUESTS TO POLICYMAKERS

- **Support HR 2071, Safe Streets Act of 2015**, sponsored by Rep. Matsui (D-CA-6th). The bill encourages communities to consider safety improvements for all users in transportation project planning.
- **Pass a long-term surface transportation bill with adequate funding measures.** Any bill should incentivize solutions to ensuring an accessible, affordable, reliable and safe transportation system for all in urban, suburban, and rural settings.