
Environmental Barriers to Train Travel for People with Physical Disabilities

Jill Bradshaw, M.S.W.

University of Connecticut
Center for Excellence in Developmental
Disabilities Education, Research & Service

Background:

- Easter Seals Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation)
- Association of University Centers on Disability
- Trainee grant for research related to transportation for people with disabilities.

Introduction:

- 30% of people with disabilities report having problems with inadequate transportation.
- A 2005 UCEDD study assessing the state of transportation services in CT identified that self-advocates had concerns about train safety and accessibility.
- Recent issues in the news related to train safety in terms of managing the gap between the platform and the train car.

Purpose:

- Identify barriers that people with physical disabilities face when riding trains
- Create a tip sheet for people with physical disabilities who are potential train riders in an effort to increase ridership and thereby increase community access and integration.
- Final report that reviews formalized policy driven solutions to accessibility compared with self-advocate solutions.

Methodology:

■ Literature Review

- Including review of policy-driven formalized solutions to accessibility identified by rail providers.

■ Focus Group

- 6-8 people with physical disabilities who had experience riding trains.

■ Field Research

- Riding local and regional railway systems including Amtrak, Metro North, NYC subways, and Washington D.C. Metrorail

Literature Review Results:

- Very little published about barriers to train travel for people with physical disabilities.
 - A few reports about current projects aimed at increasing accessibility of trains.
 - Review of policy-driven formalized solutions to accessibility barriers for the following rail providers:
 - Amtrak
 - MetroNorth Railroad
 - New York City subways
 - Washington D.C. Metrorail
-

Literature Review Continued:

Formalized Policy Driven Solutions

- **Managing the Gap: Boarding & Deboarding**
 - Bridge plates, ramps & lifts.
 - Ask conductor or railway staff for assistance.
- **Accessibility: Pedestrian & On the Train Environments**
 - Train station accessibility features: elevators & ramps, handrails, large-print signage, audio & visual information, accessibility restrooms & station booth windows, platform edge warning strips, etc.
 - Accessible seating on the train. Reservations required.

Focus Group Results:

- **Barriers to Managing the Gap: The Boarding & Deboarding Process**
 - Finding the right person to help you.
 - Accessing needed equipment (having keys to unlock bridge plates & lifts).
 - Attitudes of railway personnel.
 - Managing adaptive equipment – need to direct railway staff on type of assistance needed in handling equipment during boarding/deboarding.
 - Anxiety about crossing the gap.

Focus Group Continued:

- **Barriers to Accessibility: Pedestrian & On the Train Environments**
 - Lack of accessible restrooms
 - Steep ramps within train stations
 - Out of order elevators & escalators
 - Inaccessible ticket counters
 - Not enough accessible seats on trains
 - Attitudes of railway personnel
 - Not enough advertising about reduced priced fares for people with disabilities & personal care attendants

Field Research Results:

- **Barriers to Managing the Gap: The Boarding & Deboarding Process**
 - Attitude of railway staff appeared to be the most critical element in the boarding & deboarding process.
 - Lack of quickly accessible bridge plates also noted.
- **Barriers to Accessibility: Pedestrian & On the Train Environments**
 - Lack of accessible restrooms.
 - Narrow aisles on many train cars.
 - Out of order elevators & escalators.
 - Lack of services & staff at commuter rail stations.

Tip Sheet for First Time Train Users

- Be Courageous
- Plan Ahead
- Research Train Station Accessibility
- Plan to be Assertive
- Be Prepared
- Tips for Boarding & Deboarding
- Tips for the On the Train Environment
- And most importantly, **HAVE FUN!**

Conclusions:

- Most railway providers are actively working to reach ADA requirements to reduce accessibility barriers. Research indicates the need to not only build accessible features but to have a plan to ensure the upkeep of those features (elevators, escalators, etc.)
- There is need to look beyond physical environmental modifications and to consider the potential attitudinal barriers that might be limiting accessibility. Consider the “ADA Customer Service Training” of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority as a model.

Questions?

Contact Information:

Jill Bradshaw, M.S.W.

860-679-1584

bradshaw@uchc.edu

www.uconnuceed.org