

A Transportation Guide for Persons who are Blind or Have Low Vision

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A Transportation Guide for Persons who are Blind or Have Low Vision

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A number of transportation options to get to and from work may be available in your community. Although there may be service providers or others who will assist you in finding and accessing transportation, you will be making the decisions about the best way to get to and from work. Expending the time and effort to learn the possible options is the first step to finding the ride that best suits your needs. Every option may not be available in your community. Suggestions for locating or developing transportation options are provided.

Orientation and Mobility Training

The first step in developing your plan to get to and from work is to have good orientation and mobility (O&M) skills. A certified O&M Specialist can help you learn to orient yourself to your environment and how to travel in a safe and efficient manner. O&M instruction will enable you to confidently and safely navigate a new environment and develop essential travel skills. If you have not received O&M training and would like to, or if you received O&M training and are not confident about your travel skills, contact your state vocational rehabilitation counselor to discuss your concerns. Once these skills have been obtained, thinking about the various transportation options may not be so overwhelming.

Bioptic Driving

A potential option for individuals with mild to moderate central vision loss is driving with a bioptic lens system. Bioptics are telescopes attached to glasses that improve distance vision for drivers. Bioptic driving is not available in all states and requires extensive training with low vision devices and driver's education. More information on bioptic driving can be found at the BiOptic Driving Network at <http://www.biopticdriving.org/index.htm> or Bioptic Driving USA at <http://www.biopticdrivingusa.com/>.

Public Transportation

When available, public transportation is typically the most cost effective method to get to and from work. It likely offers the most independence, as users do not need to rely on others for transportation. Public transportation may also be called fixed-route service and it includes trains, subways, or buses that travel established paths at specified times.

Fares for public transportation vary and some systems offer discounted rates for certain groups, older adults, or people who have disabilities. Check with your local transportation provider to

determine if public transportation is offered in your area and to collect information about routes, schedules, and costs.

For help finding local public transportation providers, contact Easter Seals Project ACTION at 1-800-659-6428 or <http://www.projectaction.org>, or visit the American Public Transportation Association's website at <http://www.publictransportation.org>.

If public transportation is not available, consider alerting your elected officials that there is a need for it. Check back periodically to see if the situation changes.

If you use a service animal, such as a dog guide, that animal can ride with you on public transportation. You cannot be required to sit in a certain place if you have a service animal. The animal is typically not allowed to sit on the seats. However, your service animal should not block the aisle or exits and you are responsible for the animal's behavior.

Complementary Paratransit Service

The Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990, (ADA) has a provision for complementary paratransit services. These services may be known by different names such as Dial-a-Ride or Access Service. Paratransit is a door-to-door or curb-to-curb service provided to people with disabilities who are unable to use the fixed-route service and who meet specific eligibility requirements. ADA complementary paratransit service mirrors the routes and schedules of a fixed-route public transit system. Contact your local public transportation provider for information about paratransit programs. (See contact information in previous section about public transportation.)

There is a fee for paratransit service which will not exceed twice the fare of fixed-route service for the same trip. Paratransit operates during the same hours as the fixed route system. The ADA specifies that rides must be scheduled in advance. Some paratransit providers offer the option for subscription service if you routinely take the same trip, such as to and from work on a regular schedule. Check with your local transportation provider for their policies. Vehicles should arrive within one hour of your requested time. You are able to travel with a friend or attendant if you make a reservation for that person when you arrange your ride. For more information on ADA complementary paratransit requirements, go to <http://dredf.org/ADA/g/>.

Other Specialized Transportation Service

Other specialized transportation services may be provided by county or city government. Specialized transportation services are typically administered by programs serving people with disabilities or older adults. Human service agencies or other non-profit agencies may also provide specialized transportation. This specialized service is often referred to as "paratransit" service but should not be confused with the ADA mandated service discussed above. It may be necessary to contact several agencies to determine your options as many communities operate multiple transportation systems independent of one another and not all communities have the

same options. When contacting agencies, explain what type of transportation you need. If the agency you contact cannot assist you, ask about a referral to other potential sources for transportation. Places to contact to determine what is available and who is eligible to use the service include:

- City or county government information or disability service offices, such as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, may have transportation resource guides available or put you in contact with an Orientation and Mobility Instructor.
- The Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for urban areas can provide transportation choices that are available in those areas, as well as current and upcoming projects.
- The Regional Council of Governments (COG) for rural areas provides a similar service as MPO's, but the focus is on several towns within a state.
- Centers for Independent Living work with public transit to help others develop independent living skills, and therefore, may have information on transit routes and contact information. To find Centers for Independent Living in your state visit <http://www.virtualcil.net/cils/>.
- American Public Transportation Association, at <http://www.publictransportation.org>, is the best resource for locating public transportation and ADA complementary paratransit services.
- Easter Seals Project ACTION (hotline for information on accessible transportation), 1-800-659-6428 or <http://www.projectaction.org>, is a good place to ask accessible transportation questions of any kind and get referrals for transportation services in your community.

Taxicabs

Cabs can be used daily, but if you plan to use a cab on a regular basis it is recommended that you contact the company and negotiate a cost for your schedule. If you negotiate a contract, remember that it is with the company and not the individual driver, so plan to tip the driver. According to *CNN Money*, a 15% tip is usually adequate. The tip should be higher if the driver provides additional assistance, such as walking you to the door, helping with baggage, or making additional stops.

When you schedule the trip, provide an exact address and instructions of where to be picked up/dropped off and state whether you need additional accommodations, such as assistance getting to the entrance. While it is not always necessary to provide directions, it is helpful to be able to do so, particularly if the driver is unfamiliar with the area. You can get directions from someone at your worksite or you can get driving directions from online sources like MapQuest, <http://www.mapquest.com/>, or Google Maps, <https://maps.google.com/>.

Get information about different cab companies to determine which has the best fees, and compare reliability and safety records. Consider sharing cab expenses with a co-worker who might have a similar schedule so you can reduce costs. It is important to include in your

contract negotiations what to do when the ride is not needed, such as for vacation or sick days (Corn & Rosenblum, 2000; Easter Seals Project ACTION & Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association, 2007).

Service animals are, by law, allowed to ride in cabs. Drivers are allowed to ask whether your animal is a pet or a service animal and can ask what tasks the animal performs but drivers are not allowed to demand that you produce documentation or ask questions about your disability. As when using public transportation, you are responsible for your animal's behavior and the driver may refuse to allow you to let the animal on the seat.

Carpooling

Carpooling with Co-workers

Carpooling can be a dependable and cost effective method of getting to and from work. With fuel costs constantly changing, persons who were previously unwilling to participate in a carpool may now find themselves agreeing to do so. If other carpool participants are taking turns driving, perhaps you could participate for a fee. Discuss expectations (such as what time you need to be ready, if eating/drinking in the car is permissible) and compensation in advance.

When carpooling, be on time and communicate with the driver. Communication is especially important if you will not ride in the carpool a particular day. If you have errands or appointments before or after work, make other arrangements for transportation that day. If several drivers participate in the carpool, then it is likely that one of them will drive if the designated driver is not available. Determine in advance the plan for potential emergencies or schedule changes. If there is only one designated driver make a plan with someone who could drive you to work if the designated driver is not available (Commute Alternatives, n.d.; Corn & Rosenblum, 2000; Mid-America Regional Council, 2014).

Ask your driver to check with their automobile insurance carrier to determine the potential need for policy modifications if you ride with them on a regular basis regardless of whether you provide financial compensation. Contacting the insurance carrier is advisable even if compensation is limited to reimbursement for expenses. These issues vary by state law.

Transportation costs vary depending on the type of transportation and current prices for fuel, insurance, taxes, etc. Some drivers must pay tolls and parking fees as well and it may be appropriate for a rider to help pay for these additional expenses in addition to operational costs. Keep these factors in mind when considering how much transportation may cost. You may go to http://www.kcata.org/fares/the_true_cost_of_driving/ for a calculator that determines the true cost of how much you spend for transportation.

Based on 2012 expenses, AAA estimates that it costs an average of 51.9 to 78.3 cents per mile to operate a car, depending on the size of the vehicle and the number of miles driven per year (AAA Association Communication, 2013). For example, a mid-sized sedan driven 15,000 miles per year would cost 61 cents per mile to operate; ownership cost is estimated at \$5,987 per

year. See the AAA 2013 publication with driving costs estimates at <http://exchange.aaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Your-Driving-Costs-2013.pdf>.

Gas prices continue to fluctuate from \$3.63 in 2012, to \$3.46 in 2014, based on figures from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Visit <http://fuelcostcalculator.aaa.com/> for current information or go to www.gaspricewatch.com to find gas prices in your area. Larger and/or older cars typically get lower gas mileage than newer and/or smaller cars. A car may get as few as 12 miles per gallon or over 40 miles per gallon if the car is very efficient.

Government employees are typically reimbursed at 56 cents per mile when they use their personal cars for business travel (U.S. General Services Administration, 2013). For the most recent reimbursement rate, visit the U.S. General Services Administration's website at <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/100715>. Government employees are usually on salary, so they are being paid for their driving time; the mileage is reimbursement for fuel and vehicle use. Private employers may reimburse their employees at a different rate.

Carpooling with People Working at Nearby Businesses or with Neighbors

Find out what businesses are close to your destination and if there are people driving to and from your place of employment at similar hours. If so, make contacts there to see if you could carpool with someone from that business. If you are traveling near a large employer, such as a hospital, you can start with any personal contacts you may have there or contact the human resources department at that employer and request assistance advertising for a carpool.

You may also check to see if any of your neighbors drive to work on a similar schedule and route that would put you close to your destination. If a person lives near you and is driving to a nearby area, they may be willing to drive you to and from work for a fee. Be sure to offer fair compensation and use the same general rules as when carpooling with co-workers (Commute Alternatives; Corn & Rosenblum, 2000; Mid-America Regional Council, 2014).

Drivers

Hired Drivers

You may want to consider hiring people specifically for the purpose of driving you to and from work. This option involves an hourly or a fixed fee which is paid in addition to mileage when the driver provides the car. You could consider providing a car and maintaining it and hiring someone to drive it for you. In this case, you would pay the hourly or negotiated fee as you already paid for the cost of the car. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the current minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. You can check their website for potential changes at <http://www.dol.gov/whd/minimumwage.htm>.

Options for finding a hired driver include: asking family and friends for recommendations, checking postings at community centers or other public places such as grocery stores, posting a request or advertising for a driver yourself, checking ads in local newspapers or internet sites,

and asking at your place of worship or other civic organizations to which you may belong. Before using a hired driver, ask for and contact references with a prepared list of questions about the driver's driving habits, safety, and any other concerns. You may use those same questions to interview the driver. Remember to negotiate compensation in advance (Van, 2012).

When hiring a driver, consider having one person drive you to work and having a different person drive you home. A morning schedule fits into the routine of some people while an afternoon schedule works better for others. This is also beneficial as it allows you to have options for a backup driver if one driver becomes unavailable.

It is okay to have a trial period of a few days or weeks while you decide if a driver is right for you. Paid drivers should notify their insurance companies that they are using their vehicles to drive someone for a fee (Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

Relatives or Friends as Drivers

Asking family or friends to drive you to and from work each day can become complicated and is often not the most reliable option. Consider asking family and friends to drive only occasionally, such as in an emergency or for trips outside of work. In such cases, offer a fee for either their service or to cover the cost of fuel. It is important to reciprocate favors; doing something nice for the people who assist you with driving goes a long way toward assuring that you will get this service again in the future when it is needed (Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

If you choose to hire a friend or relative as a driver, follow the procedure you would use for hiring a driver listed above. It is necessary to treat it as a hired service with clearly defined expectations for both the service to be provided and the compensation for that service. It is also helpful to discuss in advance the steps that will be taken if the driver chooses to end the agreement or if you determine that the service is not working as needed. Settling such things in advance will protect your personal relationship from potential hard feelings (Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

Volunteer Drivers

If a driver is NOT paid to drive you, that driver is regarded as a volunteer driver. Liability laws pertaining to volunteer drivers vary by state. For more information about liability laws in your state, visit the National Conference of State Legislatures website at http://www.ncsl.org/print/transportation/vol_driverliabl06.pdf, though please note that this information is from 2006 and may have changed. It is advisable to check with the automobile insurance agent for updated information. Drivers are typically volunteering their time and may still accept reimbursement for expenses associated with driving, such as fuel costs and fees for tolls and/or parking.

Some human service agencies or non-profits establish volunteer driver programs. The purpose of these programs is to connect you with a volunteer driver for the trips you need. Although there are some programs with funding to pay the mileage reimbursement fees to the drivers, in most cases, the rider is responsible for paying this fee. While the program handles the recruitment of volunteer drivers, you also have the right to interview the driver and decide if you are comfortable using their service (Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

If you use a service animal, ask the driver if he/she is comfortable allowing the animal in their vehicle. The driver could be allergic to specific animals or may prefer not to allow animals in his/her vehicle. Discuss in advance potential problems, such as upholstery damage or bathroom accidents your animal may cause, and confirm with potential drivers that you will be responsible for repairs or clean up.

Bicycles

Riding a bicycle to work is feasible for some people. If you ride a bike other places and are confident doing that, explore the possibility of using it to get to and from work. Make sure you know the route, follow traffic signals, and are aware of safety issues. Consider changing your schedule or route to avoid high traffic times or routes if bike paths are not available. Be aware of the weather, be current on helmet laws or other bicycle regulations, and keep your ID and cell phone for emergencies (AARP, n.d.; Commute Alternatives, n.d.; Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

Walking

Some people live a short distance from their jobs and can walk to work. If you live close to your job, or are willing to relocate, walking may be an option for you. Besides being good exercise, walking will save you transportation expenses and provides you with greater independence. If you are comfortable walking to your job, make sure you know the route well and follow important safety tips. Wear brightly colored clothing at night, use sidewalks when possible, be aware of traffic or areas of potential danger, and plan in advance for weather issues (AARP, n.d.; Commute Alternatives, n.d.; Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

Back-up Plans

Emergency back up plans for transportation are necessary. Transportation arrangements can go wrong for any number of reasons and planning ahead for possible transportation problems can prevent you from being stranded. Attempt to identify one or more people who can take you to and from work on a temporary basis while you make other permanent arrangements. Always carry the phone number of someone who can give you a ride on fairly short notice in the event that your ride does not arrive on time (Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

Despite your best efforts, you may have occasions where you cannot find a ride to work. When this occurs, contact your employer and explain your situation. Try to have an estimate of when

you will have your transportation resolved. Evaluate your workplace to determine if your employer would be receptive to discussing transportation options with you. Some employers may be agreeable to helping you network with coworkers to get transportation while others may regard that discussion as an indication that you are not independent.

Once you know what is available in your area, weigh each option against the following factors:

- Cost
- Reliability
- Independence of travel
- Safety
- Convenience

Transportation Tips

Listed below are tips specific to the type of transportation you select. Many of the tips relate to appropriate interactions with other passengers or drivers.

For Public Transportation

- Have correct change. Drivers do not make change and are prohibited from handling fare unless it is needed as a reasonable accommodation under the ADA.
- Be sensitive to issues of body space. In crowded situations, people tend to stand or sit closer to each other. When it is less crowded, people tend to spread out and allow each other more personal space.
- Hold personal items or stow them under your seat. These items should not block the aisle or prevent others from sitting next to you.
- Audio devices playing music, books etc. must be used with headphones. While most public transportation allows the use of cell phones, etiquette requires that you keep your voice low and refrain from using profanity or otherwise discussing issues which may be offensive. For safety, do not give out personal information such as credit card numbers or your address.
- Respect the privacy of others. Greeting fellow passengers is polite, but not necessary, and you should avoid engaging in long conversations with people you do not know, both for your own safety and to respect the privacy of others. Some people riding the bus to and from work use that time to read or even nap and would prefer not to be engaged. You may hear others engaged in long talks but that is usually because those people are already friends, not people they just met.
- For safety reasons, be cautious about napping on public transportation. If you do choose to nap, be alert that snoring or leaning on other passengers is viewed as inappropriate behavior.

- If you are riding with a friend, be mindful of your conversation. Again, remember others can hear you. You do not want to share information that might put you at risk or make others uncomfortable.
- Do not do personal grooming while using public transportation. This includes things like combing your hair or putting on make-up.
- If you are standing up due to crowding, attempt to move to the side so others can enter or exit.
- Eating and drinking are often prohibited on public transit. Check with your local provider to learn their policy. When eating and drinking are prohibited, chewing gum or eating small pieces of candy are usually allowed. If you need a reasonable modification to be made to a no eating and drinking policy because of disability (e.g. you need access to appropriate food or drink because of diabetes), then this should be arranged with the transit provider in advance.
- Pick up after yourself; do not leave wrappers or napkins or other items on public transportation.
- Steer away from strongly scented perfumes, body lotions, or cologne as you will be in close contact with others who may not enjoy the scent or may be sensitive to it.

(AARP, n.d.; Alabama Department of Mental Health. 2010; Commute Alternatives, n.d.; Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

For Taxicabs

- If you state a preferred route, the driver is supposed to take it. The driver may recommend another route but it is up to the passenger. If the route you request takes longer than you anticipated, do not blame the driver.
- When you call for a cab, tell the dispatcher your address and where you are going. Ask how long it should take you to get to your destination and about how much it will cost. If you need assistance at pick up or drop off, be sure and let the dispatcher know.
- Tell the driver if you need assistance at drop off well before arriving at your destination.
- If you use the same cab company regularly, you can ask for a particular driver or ask that you not get a particular driver.
- You may ask the driver to turn down the radio but the driver usually decides what station to listen to.
- Ask the driver for their name and cab number in case you have a problem. You will want to report problems to the cab company later and will need this information, along with the date, your route, and your destination.
- Always ask for a receipt. This information is also helpful if you forget something in the cab.
- Fasten your seatbelt. In many states this is the law and the driver can get a fine if you are not buckled up.
- Speak clearly so the driver can hear you.
- Do not smoke.
- If you have a drink, be sure it is in a spill proof cup, and keep snacks small.

- Clean up your mess.
- Do not forget to tip. For occasional trips, 15%; for regular trips, at least one or two dollars. If you have bags or put items in the trunk, you will need to tip more. If you negotiate a weekly or hourly rate, you still need to tip the driver.
- Have cash available for payment; credit/debit cards may or may not be accepted, and checks are usually not accepted.

(Community Transportation Association of America, 2011; Commute Alternatives, n.d.; Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

For Hired Drivers

- Be clear about what time you need to be picked up and dropped off. Remember that you have a business relationship and each person should fulfill their commitments.
- Confirm compensation before you make any trip.
- Your driver should respect your privacy but you should be aware that very personal conversations are not appropriate.

(Corn & Rosenblum, 2000).

For Carpools

- Carpool members typically do not want to do errands on the way to or from work.
- Communicate with persons in the carpool. If you are running late, let them know, though you should always try to be on time. Being late is a big problem for everyone in the carpool.
- Communicate about reimbursement and do not make the driver ask you for the money. Establish when it should be paid, like the beginning or end of each week, and offer it.
- Give notice if you will not be in the carpool a particular day.
- Stick to whatever rules the carpool has agreed on about smoking, eating, and drinking.
- Steer away from potentially controversial topics. For example, do not bring up extremely personal issues, religion, or politics unless you already know others in the carpool very well; even when you do know them well, be cautious about these topics.
- Get a sense of whether others in the carpool prefer to chat or have a quiet ride and attempt to accommodate group preferences. Be mindful that conversation may distract a driver.
- In some carpools, passengers may nap. If you snore, this is not a good idea. If you do go to sleep, do not lean on the other passengers.
- Do not have lengthy personal or business cell phone chats in the car.
- If you use audio devices, use headphones.
- Steer away from strongly scented perfumes, body lotions or cologne as you will be in close contact with others who may not enjoy the scent or may be sensitive to it.
- Be respectful of the car. Do not damage the interior (upholstery) or exterior (slamming doors). Put your belongings in the trunk if the car is crowded or you are traveling with equipment.

- Be flexible. Sometimes, unexpected things will happen.
- Be aware that the tallest person or someone who gets carsick may prefer the front seat.
- Respect the driver's decision about routes. This is not a cab where you have control. You can discuss preferred routes but the driver has the final decision.
- Be polite to everyone in the car. Remember that everyone has bad days, and be tolerant of each other.
- Wear your seatbelt.

(Community Transportation Association of America, 2011; Commute Alternatives, n.d.; Corn & Rosenblum, 2000; Mid-America Regional Council, 2014).

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