

# Ideas for Accessible Transit

Generated at the 2016 AACT Summit by the disability community

## What we asked:

- What is working in the MBTA system? What is not working?
- How can we work together to make transportation accessible for everyone, in the near and long term?

✓ denotes a topic discussed in more than one of the four breakout groups

## RIDE

- Works
  - **Same day requests**—this was a popular RIDE service
- Sometimes works
  - ✓ **RIDE drivers**
    - Drivers are generally helpful and polite, well-trained, competent, safe, accommodating.
    - Riders have positive experiences when everything works well, which it sometimes does.
    - Some regions and vendors have poorer quality RIDE service in driver training, booking, and dispatch (one person reported they prefer GLSS over Veterans)
  - **Driver assistance**
    - RIDE drivers have a limited ability to assist riders due to liability implications. For example, drivers cannot go into a person's home or enclosed porch, rendering the service inaccessible for people with very limited mobility.
- Doesn't work
  - **Arrival information**
    - Passengers do not receive notifications when the RIDE will be late, which prevents them from knowing if they can go to the bathroom, retrieve a belonging, etc.
    - It would be helpful to know not only how many miles away the vehicle is, but also its ETA.
    - The information provided is not standardized, varying by vehicles and systems.

- **Landline phones**
  - RIDE notifications require a cell phone
- **Shock absorbers**
  - “Serious bouncing” felt, which is especially unsafe for those in wheelchairs
- **GPS software**
  - RIDE software doesn’t always work—it should be similar to an ambulance GPS
- **Drop off zones**
  - At South Station, drop off zones do not allow drivers to pull up to the curb

- **Do now**

- **Emergency plan**—put in place for if/when the system goes down and when there is an emergency
- **Customer service**
  - Hire more representatives and give them specific tasks so that they do not get pulled away from work at hand to address multiple responsibilities.
  - Always have a supervisor on duty to handle administrative tasks.
- **Common locations** Find a way to educate RIDE drivers about the location of common origin/destination spots, such as the State Transportation Building.
- **Online bookings**
- **Taxi drivers** Train how to interact with people with disabilities
- **Fixed-route boundaries** Illustrate these on a publicly-accessible map to show who is eligible for RIDE service and to clearly communicate service timing.

- **Do later**

- **MBTA control** Consider having the T control the RIDE operations rather than vendors for more consistency and quality
- **Private collaborations** Find ways to balance public and private services and facilitate collaboration ex: RIDE/uber connection
- **Customer choice app** Design an app that facilitates customer choice between the RIDE, taxi, uber, fixed route.
- **Medical training for Uber drivers**
- **Call center improvements** Design The Ride’s call center to run like Uber by including text message reminders when the driver is approaching. This would inform users of the amount of time remaining before they are picked up by The Ride.

# Bus

- Works

- **Visual Announcements** Red scrolling announcements on the bus are focused and accurate. The scrolls include the operator's numbers.
- **Pre-testing**—Previously, bus models and bus routes were pre-tested before vehicles were officially purchased or the routes were made final. The presenter noted that participants explained this had worked in the past and that participants wanted the practice to be reinstated, as it allowed people with disabilities to provide input and helped ensure that buses and routes provided good and accessible service.
- **Consolidation of stops** works when done carefully.

- Sometimes works

- **Lowering busses**
  - MBTA bus drivers consistently and automatically lower busses in Medford, Somerville, Cambridge, Downtown.
  - Other participants noted that drivers in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan did not lower busses without a request, and that they sometimes seemed to resent having to do so.
  - Kneeling mechanisms on bus are frequently broken, according to an MBTA bus driver.
- **Bus Stop Call Buttons**
  - Often missing or broken, especially those located under bus seats
- **Bus ramps**
  - Many do not work
- **Priority seating**
  - Citizens often do not give priority seats to people with disabilities in the Dorchester and Roxbury area and do not always cooperate with drivers when asked to do so.
  - Some drivers do not ask people to yield their seats at all.
  - Some levers/pulls/buttons for releasing priority chairs don't work (ex: Bus 0054)
  - ✓ Some drivers do not put down priority seats for people with limited mobility, and they must do so themselves
- **Priority boarding**
  - ✓ Strollers often take up the accessible spaces
  - ✓✓ Bus drivers sometimes do not let passengers with disabilities board the bus when there are strollers taking up space
  - ✓✓ Bus drivers do not always let those with disabilities board first

- **Wheelchair accessible spaces**
  - **Designated Bus Areas**
  - Automobiles commonly park in bus stops
- **Doesn't work**
  - **Accessibility information of bus stops**
    - No information provided about the relative accessibility of bus stops. It would be helpful to have descriptions of the surrounding environment: are there sidewalks? Is the stop raised? Is there grass on the side of the road? Even providing a link to Google Street View would be helpful.
  - **Shock absorbers**
    - "Serious bouncing" felt, which is especially unsafe for those in wheelchairs
  - **Bus maintenance**
    - Cabot Garage does not adequately maintain busses
- **Do now**
  - **Kneeling busses** raise driver awareness on the need to kneel
  - **Sensitivity training** mandate ongoing training—not a one-shot deal.
  - **Monitor bus drivers** Ensure that they comply with rules governing interactions with people with disabilities.
  - **Follow-up and track complaints**
  - **Audio announcements**
    - Make them as clear and accurate and timely as the visual ones
      - Visually-impaired riders can miss their stops if the location announcement is delayed.
    - Train MBTA bus drivers to make accurate and helpful service announcements
    - Have a plan B for when the automated announcements aren't working
  - **Snow plowing** MBTA ensures clearing of all bus stops and adjacent sidewalks
  - **Maintenance** Ensure that busses are well-maintained before they are sent into the streets
  - **Protect bus drivers** by placing undercover police on busses upon driver request
- **Do later**
  - **Standardize bus signs**—so that people with vision impairments can easily recognize by touch.
  - **Beacons** at all stations and bus stops provide wayfinding information and open data submitted from other disabled users

# Subway and Stations

- Works
  - **Station elevators** — more functional and break down less frequently.
- Doesn't work
  - **Long access ramps**—in the absence of an elevator option
- Do now
  - **Elevators**
    - Report broken ones
    - Respond quickly to complaints and break-downs
    - Improve cleanliness
  - **Green line** enforce fare payment
- Do later
  - **CharlieCard Store** Find a better way to access the store coming from the Orange line if you were originally going South. There is a way but there are no signs (going up and elevator to street).

# Commuter Rail

- Works
  - **Bike accessible trains**—add them to other lines
  - **“Bike Accessible” markings** A participant noted a train car that included bicycle racks on the Fairmount Line Commuter Rail. This prevents conflict between cyclists and people with limited mobility.
- Doesn't work
  - **Priority seating**
    - The priority seating on the Commuter Rail are next to the bathrooms, which can be unpleasant.
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- Sometimes works
  - **Accessible areas on trains**
    - ✓ Bikes often block the accessible seating areas

- ✓ Conductors don't always enforce the rule that bikes are not allowed during peak hours.
- Do now
- Do later

## Roads

- Works
  - **Tactile strips**—install more on sidewalks, and on the streets, too.
- Doesn't work
  - **Construction areas**
    - Lack of accessible wayfinding
    - Issues with temporary barriers for people with disabilities
- Do now
  - **Sidewalks** improve conditions
  - **Parking restrictions** Enforce, especially at T stops, accessible stops, and ramps
- Do later

## Overall and/or Multiple Services

- Works
- Doesn't work
  - **Customer service return calls**
    - Calls aren't returned, so the passenger does not know if an action has been taken to rectify the issue.
  - **Customer service signage**
    - Confusing. Consider changing the color of the call buttons.
  - **Communication**
    - People do not feel informed about changes in MBTA service.
  - **Verbal announcements**
    - People with limited hearing do not receive adequate express and emergency information

- Ambient noise makes it difficult to hear loud speaker announcements on rapid transit and the commuter rail.
- Overall, verbal announcements are not as clear or direct as the visual ones on most busses and trains (the red scroll).
- Canned messages have little consistency as to what is announced, the speaker's volume, and the announcement frequency (when *not* done, people miss connections; when overdone, people tune announcements out).
- Canned messages are not always accurate, sometimes going on at the wrong location, leading to missed or wrong connections. Other times the speaker will say that the bus is "stopping here with connections to..." and then the announcement ends without supplying information.
- ✓ Announcements sometimes have poor timing, coming too late to allow passengers with vision impairments to hit the stop button in time.
- ✓ Drivers do not always provide accurate, timely information (or any information at all) when the automated announcement system isn't functioning.
- Operator number often goes unreported in the verbal announcements, even as it shows up on the visual ticker.

- Do now

- **Communication**—maintain multiple means of communication (email, facebook, twitter, AACT meetings, station announcements, text alerts), especially for big changes in service. Post 90 days before change is implemented.
- **Tactile MBTA maps**—both poster-sized ones in stations, foldable printed copies (embossed? lasercut? sewn?), and on mobile devices.

- Do now

- **Income-based fares**
- **Engaged Planning**
  - Engage a diverse, representative community in the MBTA planning process.
  - Seek input on transit vehicle design from the disability community.
  - Plan for the programmatic equivalent of PATI (non-infrastructure)
- **Training** Train RIDE drivers, bus drivers, and train conductors based on robust input from the disability community on how to sensitively interact with people with disabilities
- **Communications**
  - Use social media, twitter, and forums regularly and responsively
  - Publicize AACT to drivers of RIDE and also on fixed route service
  - Create an advertisement campaign about priority seating and other faux pas (similar to what NYC did in its subways)

- Create policies for following up with people with disabilities about their complaints
    - Capture more information from riders—develop a method for riders with disabilities to rate their ride and provide feedback, perhaps through automated text-messaging
    - Clarify all the acronyms in transportation planning
  - **Data accessibility** Make more MBTA data accessible and engaging to the public
  - **Payment** Provide choices: in person, phone, online, mobile phone, stores
  - **Priority seating enforcement** Give bus drivers and MBTA police the authority to ticket persons who do not give up priority seating to those in need
  - **Wayfinding**
    - Improve signage for people with disabilities
    - Ensure that signage is designed thoughtfully, with the user in mind: in the most important locations, accurate, aesthetically appealing, sufficient in quantity but not too many.
    - Put place names in context—ex: including town name in labels such as “Central Square” “Main St.”
    - When including braille, make sure that it is in the shade
  - **Online schedules**
    - Ensure accuracy
    - Fix issues with screen readers reading schedules: when two lines are combined, the screen reader goes haywire ex: 24/27
  - **Prisoner transport** Make sure that the police have accessible vehicles—they currently call ambulances
- **Do later**
  - Purchase more accessible vehicles
  - Educate the value of transit to people with disabilities
  - Provide more places to buy specialized CharlieCards