



2004 New Jersey Public Transportation Survey for People with Disabilities

Conducted By
New Jersey Protection and Advocacy, Inc.
and United Spinal Association

Introduction

United Spinal Association, formerly known as Eastern Paralyzed Veteran's Association, and New Jersey Protection & Advocacy, Inc., collaborated to conduct an on-line survey regarding the use of different forms of transportation for people with disabilities within the State of New Jersey.

New Jersey Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (NJP&A) is the federally-funded non-profit organization that serves as New Jersey's designated protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in the State. NJP&A's mission is to advocate and advance the human, civil and legal rights of persons with disabilities to ensure they are treated equally in the community. For more information visit our Website at <http://www.njpanda.org/>

United Spinal Association is a nonprofit, national veterans service and disability rights organization founded in 1946. The Association is dedicated to enhancing the lives of individuals with spinal cord injury or disease by assuring quality health care, promoting research, advocating for civil rights and independence, educating the public about these issues and enlisting its help to achieve these fundamental goals. United Spinal has been a leading organization in advocating for accessible transportation nationwide through its work on the transportation provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. For more information visit our Website at www.unitedspinal.org

The survey was distributed on September 15, 2004, and remained open until December 31, 2004. The survey was provided to the Centers for Independent Living, the County Offices for the Disabled, the Monday Morning Groups, the members of the Disability Budget Coalition, and through various disability advocacy organizations. In addition, the survey was advertised at the New Jersey Public Libraries and discussed with the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities and New Jersey Protection & Advocacy, Inc.'s Protection and Advocacy for Developmental Disabilities Advisory.

Paper copies of the survey were provided to those who requested them. A total of 136 surveys were received and the information contained in this report is based upon the responses of these 136 individuals. While the survey was distributed to all twenty-one counties, no responses were received from four counties: Atlantic, Cape May, Salem, and Sussex.

BACKGROUND

Currently there are four main types of transportation services offered in New Jersey:

1. New Jersey Transit Rail Service - This is the regularly scheduled train service.
2. New Jersey Transit Bus Service - This is the regularly scheduled bus service; it includes lift-equipped buses.

3. New Jersey Transit Access Link Para-transit Service - Required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Access Link provides people with disabilities para-transit service comparable to the local bus service. This service is specifically for people whose disability prevents them from using existing local bus service.
4. County Para-transit Service - Required by the State Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Assistance Act. Each of the 21 counties in New Jersey provides County-Based Para-transit service for senior citizens and people with disabilities.

The lack of affordable, accessible public transportation and demand-response para-transit is one of the most pressing problems facing individuals with disabilities who want to live independent and productive lives. Public transportation provides greater access to employment, education, medical care, and to a host of other services and activities that help people with disabilities, and all persons, be active and productive members of their communities; therefore, individuals with disabilities need the option of accessible public transportation. Despite these obvious benefits, New Jersey's transportation system is not accessible to all.

While New Jersey Transit (NJT) continues to improve its accessibility, approximately only 1/3 of their rail stations are accessible - 60 of 161 stations. These stations are accessible by elevator, ramp, mini high-level platform or portable lift. Unfortunately, these elevators and lifts tend to break which leads to temporary access problems at the stations they serve.

NJT also operates three light rail stations - the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Transit System, the River Line and the Newark City Subway. All stations and stops are accessible on the Hudson-Bergen Line and the River Line. The Newark Line is not fully accessible so travelers must call NJT to find out which stations are accessible.

In addition, NJT provides two types of bus service - local route service and commuter route service. Of NJT's local bus routes, approximately 99 percent have a lift-equipped bus on every trip. Commuter bus routes, however, have a lower percentage of lift-equipped buses. Travelers needing a lift-equipped commuter route bus must reserve one by 4:00 PM the day before the day of travel. NJT also contracts with private bus carriers to serve certain routes. Travelers with disabilities must call the private carrier in advance to reserve a lift-equipped bus.

In addition to the traditional train and bus options, there is also the option of para-transit for some individuals with disabilities. The need for para-transit services is not being met for those individuals who cannot ride the train or a bus due to their disability. Unless New Jersey acts now, these service gaps will grow far worse in the very near future because demand for accessible public transportation and para-transit expects to continue rising. National and state demographics demonstrate that the number of people with

disabilities, including the elderly, will continue to grow over the next decade and so will the need for accessible transportation.

New Jersey has two para-transit programs: the Senior Citizen and Disabled Resident Transportation Assistance Program (SCDRTAP), which is funded through the Casino Revenue Fund and run by counties, and Access Link, New Jersey Transit's para-transit service required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These programs do not come close to meeting the demand for services for a number of reasons. First, funding for these programs is extremely limited. Second, due to limited funding, serious restrictions are imposed upon consumers. For example, under SCDRTAP, most county para-transit systems do not cross county lines, do not run on weekends, holidays, or at night, and, in many instances, do not take consumers to rural parts of counties. Under Access Link, which is bound by federal regulations, an eligible consumer's trip (origin and destination) must fall within 3/4 of a mile on either side of a local bus route. A person who has no bus service in their region, like in many rural areas, has no Access Link service either. Finally, these are two separate programs whose services are not coordinated.

Because of the limitations of the para-transit systems and the lack of accessibility of NJT trains and buses, the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities is still great. It is the hope of NJP&A and the United Spinal Association that the results of this survey will bring attention to the need to improve public transportation for individuals with disabilities.

Survey Results

The results of the survey will be divided into three categories. The first is New Jersey Transit Train and Bus. The second is New Jersey Transit Access Link Para-transit. The final category is County-Based Para-transit. Of particular note is that 87 individuals responded that the type of transportation used most frequently is personal car or getting a ride from friends and family. Therefore, the majority of the individuals taking this survey do not use public transportation on a regular basis. The greatest need for transportation was for employment and medical appointments, with 69 individuals noting each of these categories.

New Jersey Transit Train and Bus

- A few individuals noted that often times it is difficult to obtain the appropriate ramp to board the train because the conductors are never positioned near the accessible cars.
- Most individuals found the cost of the New Jersey Train and Bus to be fair and indicated that they can usually understand the schedules.
- Some individuals noted that the bus schedules are not well-coordinated with the train schedules, making connections extremely difficult.

- Most individuals noted that the trains and buses are accessible to their needs.

New Jersey Transit Access Link

- The majority of individuals noted that they do not use Access Link.
- The survey responses were fairly evenly divided as to whether the scheduling of an Access Link trip was or was not easy and useful.
- Many of the problems for individuals involved customer service issues. This included being placed on hold for long periods of time, Access Link not being able to accurately book more than one trip in a telephone call, and reservationists not trained in the proper use of TTY. In addition, drivers were noted to be rude and disrespectful to people with disabilities.
- Most individuals found Access Link accessible to their needs and the cost to be fair.
- Individuals noted that their usual waiting time for pick ups was between 20 to 40 minutes.

County-Based Para-transit

- The majority of individuals did not use County-Based Para-transit.
- The survey responses were fairly evenly divided as to whether the scheduling of a County-Based Para-transit trip was or was not easy and useful.
- There were several complaints that County-Based Para-transit does not run on nights and weekends and that trips needed to be scheduled two weeks in advance of the trip.
- All individuals found the cost of County-Based Para-transit to be fair or inexpensive.
- Most individuals who used the County-Based Para-transit found it to be accessible to their needs.

General Comments from Survey Responses

- Public transportation is not available on nights and weekends even though most people with disabilities are employed in jobs not typically involving Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., work week.
- Access Link trips are inefficient and take exceptionally long periods of time.
- Many individuals noted they were outside the area for Access Link and County Para-transit.
- None of the para-transit staff provide assistance getting in and out of the home to the bus.
- Public transportation is generally not available on holidays.
- Limited para-transit services make it difficult to work.
- The door opening of New Jersey Transit buses is unacceptable. An individual responded that she will use another mode of transportation unless buses drivers are required to stop the bus before opening the door.