

GRAB AND GO PRACTICES

Breaking Barriers: Transportation and Mobility Solutions for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in College

By Maria Paiewonsky

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INTRODUCTION

Flexible and accessible transportation is becoming increasingly important as more opportunities become available for people with disabilities to participate in their communities and on college campuses. However, inaccessible transportation is often a significant barrier for people with disabilities. Sometimes the only transportation option for transition-age students and young adults with intellectual disabilities is the special transportation offered by their school or provider agency. While this can be helpful for traveling between home and a single designated location, it can be limiting for people looking to broaden their experiences.

Increasingly, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can attend college and fully participate like any other student—taking classes, working, engaging in campus activities, and socializing. The more time students spend on campus, the more chances they have to explore a variety of classes, join clubs, and attend events. Access to campus opportunities often depends on public transportation, making it essential for students to receive training in its use. By gaining these skills, students reduce their reliance on more limited transportation options.

We have identified several public transportation solutions through discussion groups with school and college staff who are partnering to support students with intellectual disabilities in college. These solutions include training students to use fixed-route buses and trains, applying for and using paratransit services, and using shared ride services like Uber and Lyft. In this Grab and Go issue, we will review each of these options.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS

Fixed-Route Buses and Trains

Fixed-route buses and trains are a great option for students with disabilities. They are generally reliable, and once a student learns one route, the skills they acquire can help them explore other routes and expand their experiences. Many free travel training curricula are available online and through local mass transit departments. These resources offer instruction on reading transit maps and schedules, planning travel routes, traveling safely, and estimating travel time. Additionally, most students are eligible for discounted fares through student pass programs. People with disabilities are also eligible for discounted fares.

Formal travel training is also available. Many transit agencies offer travel training through local transit authorities, and some independent living centers provide travel instruction as well.

Paratransit Services

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), paratransit services are designed to be comparable to fixed-route public transportation. These services are available to people who are unable to independently use public transportation. However, having a disability alone does not guarantee eligibility. Generally, people seeking to use paratransit services, including those with intellectual disabilities, must complete an application that includes supporting documentation. They also might be required to participate in an in-person interview at a mobility testing center. If granted eligibility, individuals



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must learn how to schedule their own rides and communicate where and when they need transportation.

Shared Ride Services

Some schools use the opportunity to teach students how to use shared ride services like Uber or Lyft. Students, parents, and all relevant school staff should approve the use of these services. Travel training for shared ride services includes teaching students how to download and use the app to arrange rides, monitor the correct car, and follow general safety guidelines. Staff typically fade their support as students become more confident in using rideshare services. This structured fading process may involve staff riding with the student initially, then following the car, and eventually meeting the student at the destination, such as a designated drop-off point on campus.

TRAVEL VS. MOBILITY

In addition to using transportation to get to and from college, students must also navigate campus independently, with or without support. Let's clarify the distinction between these two terms:

Travel: Getting from one environment to another.

Mobility: Navigating within an environment.

Mobility skills for students on campus include:

- » moving from a designated stop to various destinations (e.g., café, student center, classrooms, academic support centers)
- » navigating open spaces like dining halls, fitness centers, and campus greens
- » learning to use stairs, elevators, and escalators
- » moving around campus efficiently to follow their schedules

To support these skills, you may need to allocate time for extending travel instruction into mobility instruction. This can include teaching about how to use tools like campus apps (maps, shuttle schedules, accessibility information) and smartphone apps for walking directions as well as how to set alarms to promote greater independence.

CONCLUSION

Transportation can be a major barrier for students with intellectual disabilities, often limiting them to special services provided by schools or agencies. Expanding their independence through alternative options like fixed-route buses, trains, paratransit services, and rideshares (e.g., Uber and Lyft) is essential. Schools offer training in these areas, from reading transit maps to navigating apps for rideshare services. Students with disabilities can also access discounted fares. Beyond transportation, students must develop mobility skills on campus, learning to navigate spaces independently using resources like campus maps and smartphone apps, which can promote greater freedom and participation in college life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Paiewonsky, EdD is the director of the Massachusetts Center for Inclusive Higher Education and Transition at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston.

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The Center for Inclusive Higher Education and Transition is dedicated to advancing higher education and transition initiatives across Massachusetts. Our mission is to promote positive post-school outcomes for individuals with disabilities. We achieve this by offering professional development, training, and support to families, practitioners, advocates, and community partners.

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