

Accessible Transportation Around the World



The Newsletter of
Access Exchange International
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China moves ahead with inclusive transport in major cities



Major Chinese cities are moving ahead with access to public transportation in preparation for the Olympics and as part of a multi-year national policy. (Photo from Suning Huang in Shenzhen) – Story on Page 2

Mexico City: Transit planners learn from experience how to enhance access to a Bus Rapid Transit system



As part of a major conference on implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Access Exchange International teamed up with Libre Acceso of Mexico City to inspect access features on a newly opened extension of one of the world's most highly used Bus Rapid Transit Systems.

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New BRT station in Mexico City – Photo by Tom Rickert



Group from Fushun, China, hosted by AEI in San Francisco

MEXICO CITY *(continued from page 1)*

The inspection team was impressed with improved access features on the extension of the *Metrobús* Bus Rapid Transit line on Insurgentes Avenue, where nine additional stations have been added. Station



improvements include a deeply grooved tactile guideway to assist blind passengers (photo at left) and Braille information plates. Wheelchair users can access a button to operate a warning light to notify approaching bus drivers to carefully dock their buses to reduce the horizontal gap of some 10 cm between the raised station platform and the floor of the bus.

However, much work remains to be done to improve sidewalk accessibility to bus stations along the route.

Rehabilitation Int'l. Conference on U.N. Convention

Mexico's *Metrobús* BRT corridor is a practical step forward that is also in line with the requirements of the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention is currently in force for the 27 countries that have already ratified the Convention, which was signed last year by 129 nations to kick off the ratification process. The implementation of the Convention was the subject of a major conference in Mexico City in April, sponsored by Rehabilitation International (RI) in collaboration with Mexico's National Council for Disabled Persons, Foreign Affairs Ministry, and other agencies. The conference drew hundreds of representatives from throughout the Americas. Tom Rickert of AEI presented a case study on how the Convention can be implemented in terms of providing access features to the new Bus Rapid Transit systems now being planned around the world.

CHINESE CITIES

Preparations for the Olympic and Paralympic Games have speeded the addition of 2,800 accessible buses on 34 bus lines in Beijing, while a rapid transit line linking the Olympic Park with downtown Beijing is undergoing improvements as well (photo below). Braille signage and tactile guideways are being added to all stations for three Beijing Metro lines as well as a fourth line to Batong. In addition, new door-to-door services have recently been introduced in Beijing.

There is also progress in cities in southern China. What promises to be China's highest-capacity Bus Rapid Transit system is under construction in Guangzhou. Shenzhen, also in southern China, is moving ahead with access to bus services (photo on front page) and to a recently opened subway line. Shenzhen also hopes to initiate service with 50 accessible taxis. And most transport modes in Hong Kong have been accessible for many years. (Eric Zhong and Suning Huang contributed to this article.)



ISTANBUL: Progress & concerns

Twenty-eight lift- and ramp-equipped vans (photos at right) are part of a larger 50-vehicle fleet which has initiated free door-to-door services provided by the City of Istanbul. The service is open to qualifying low-income persons with disabilities and seniors who are unable to use “fixed route” public transit. Different monthly trip limits are set according to the needs of applicants, but are not constrained by trip purpose. For example, students going to school every day may be eligible for more monthly trips than those with less demanding needs. The service is operated by the Health and Social Services Dept. of the Persons with Disabilities Office. (Information from Tulay Alkan-Atalay of Veolia Transportation in San Francisco, from her meetings in Istanbul.)

Some rail stations in Istanbul are also accessible (photo at bottom). Meanwhile, a report in March about Istanbul’s recently opened Bus Rapid Transit line notes its success in relieving congestion with faster rides for bus passengers (photo at lower right), but raises concerns about difficult pedestrian access due to a lack of ramps and elevators, a lack of information for disabled and other users, and excessive gaps between the raised platforms and buses. (Information from Sibel Bulay, photos courtesy of Sibel Bulay and At van Herk.)



Boarding new van (top), portion of fleet (below)



New Istanbul BRT line beats congestion (top), but is it fully accessible? Below, access at rail station.



PHILIPPINES: National conference puts transit access on the agenda

Nearly two hundred key national and local stakeholders participated in the Philippines’ First National Conference on Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities, held March 27-28 in Quezon City. The national Department of Transportation and Communications served as the lead agency for the conference with broad attendance by disability advocates and government officials. (Information from Richard Arceno and Michael Barredo)



How San Francisco Created a World-Class

The history of Access Exchange International – now in its 18th year – is intertwined with the development of accessible transportation in San Francisco, California. Tom Rickert, AEI's Executive Director, reports on how advocacy by persons with disabilities led to big changes in San Francisco's attitude toward "mobility for all," and then led to the founding of Access Exchange International.

This is the fourth in a series of first-hand reports about "making access happen" in different countries. Earlier reports were from Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom.

In 1975, I was the coordinator of a community coalition in western San Francisco called "SPEAK." We were working with the city's transit agency, known as Muni, to improve the N-Judah light-rail line that is part of the city's Metro. People boarded the Metro cars without steps in underground stations, and the steps were lowered when the cars exited the tunnel from downtown to operate on the city streets. One day, I was

contacted by Muni with the news that, unknown to us, a group of wheelchair-users had banded together to form the Coalition for the Removal of Architectural Barriers (CRAB), and they wanted to roll onto the Metro *at floor level*, not by climbing steps from street level! The article below from a SPEAK newsletter in 1975 illustrates the ramped platforms proposed by the wheelchair riders in CRAB.



What do successful accessible transportation programs have in common?

Tom Rickert of AEI presented some conclusions at meetings in Washington DC this past January, touching upon the positive experience of countries with matured access programs (e.g., the UK and the USA) as well as countries with more recent commitments, including China, India, Vietnam, Colombia, Brazil, and South Africa. Common elements include –

- Transit officials *listen to and learn from* disabled persons concerning their accessibility needs.
- A *policy framework* (legislation) is in place requiring that public transit become accessible to seniors and persons with disabilities. In the USA, this legislation is called the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- *Regulations* are in place on how to *implement* the policy framework.
- *Staff have been assigned* at national and/or local levels who are *tasked* with carrying out the many details of making transit accessible.
- Each country and city *learns from its mistakes* and corrects its mistakes in new projects.
- *Different departments* (e.g., *transit and public works ministries*) *cooperate together* in making sidewalks, transit stops, and buses and trains accessible.
- Transit staff and disability advocates *participate in workshops and conferences* where they share what they have learned.

Suddenly, all our plans were in disarray! Our decision to first listen to the members of CRAB, then work with them to successfully advocate for a city policy supporting accessible public transportation, was going to affect the rest of my life. The first result of this decision was that Muni promised to study the issue of building high-level ramped platforms so that wheelchair users and other persons with disabilities could board the Metro cars at floor level. One thing led to another, and five years later I joined the Muni staff to help implement the very policies which had been promoted by CRAB and SPEAK.

During my ten years with Muni, most of them as Manager of Accessible Services, I learned that it is one thing to *advocate* for change, and it is another to actually *implement* change. Advocacy took courage and persistence on the part of disabled San Franciscans. Implementation took a lot of hard work on a multitude of details. We worked with disability advocates to form an advisory committee to recommend and monitor improvements as we phased in access to the one thousand diesel buses and electric trolley coaches and Metro cars operated by Muni. One Muni line after another became accessible as we deployed new lift-equipped buses and trolley coaches. Now, every bus and trolley coach in our city is accessible. Our first rail platform was built in 1982 and this program has gradually expanded to today's count of more than

Mass Accessible Transportation System

40 platforms (photo below) to complement elevator access to our underground stations. Meanwhile, the city's Department of Public Works has installed thousands of curb ramps that enable disabled customers to reach our bus stops.



As is true around the world, many disabled persons needed "door-to-door" transportation. The stakeholders interested in these "paratransit" services formed San Francisco's Paratransit Coordinating Council (PCC) to recommend and monitor improvements to our van and taxi services. A majority of PCC members are persons with disabilities using the door-to-door system, but city departments and service providers are also represented. We provided only 80,000 trips in 1980, all using vans. And the service was not well planned. Then it was decided that the City should hire a "paratransit broker" to operate the service. The broker (currently Veolia Transportation) contracts with taxi and van operators to provide the most efficient service. In addition to lift-equipped vans and other vans, regular taxis and ramp-equipped taxis were phased into the system. And the PCC went on to become an example of full participation by disabled people in the process which has made San Francisco's door-to-door services one of the best in the USA. Currently, San Francisco provides more than one million door-to-door trips every year to qualifying riders.



Then, in 1990, I decided to step down from my position with Muni in order to share all that we had learned with countries which were just beginning the long road toward "mobility for all." Looking back to that first experience in 1975, I realized that boarding a vehicle at floor level was a key concept. And if ramped platforms would work on our rail vehicles, then perhaps they would work on buses in less-wealthy countries as well. We tested the idea (see the photo at lower left) and it worked. That was how Access Exchange International was born!

Meanwhile, Muni has kept right on improving its accessibility to bus, rail, taxi, and van services. A new debit card fare payment will soon be initiated so that qualifying van and taxi riders can access the system more easily. Nowadays, anyone visiting our city will see wheelchair users and others with disabilities "out and about" on the streets of San Francisco. Other passengers are no longer surprised to see people with disabilities riding with them. We are all just living our lives – and that is what Access Exchange International wants to see in countries around the world.

- Tom Rickert

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Inclusive Transportation

Research that makes a difference around the world

Our international readers in 90 countries are invited to consider the following opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills and contribute to research in the universal design of “access for all” in years ahead.

→ Participate in TRANSED 2010 in Hong Kong

The 12th International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons (TRANSED 2010) will take place in Hong Kong in June 2010 with the theme of “Sustainable Transport and Travel for All.” The conference will be hosted by the Hong Kong Society for



Rehabilitation. TRANSED promotes solutions to accessibility issues through sharing of ideas and practical know-how, and by addressing the needs of people with all types of disability as well as seniors. The conference will address concerns including accessible tourism, cost and environmental issues, and access solutions for those with cognitive and sensory disabilities. An Expo of vehicles and equipment will accompany the conference, and study tours of China and Macau will follow. Detailed information will be available at www.transed2010.hk.



Conference organizer Mabel Chou is shown in the photo at left with Jamie Osborne of the San Francisco Muni, at a recent conference in Washington, DC. Readers may wish to look at the many excellent presentations from the very successful

TRANSED held in Montréal in 2007 by going to www.tc.gc.ca/transed2007.

→ Study Inclusive Mobility in the U.K.

The need for inclusive mobility is increasingly recognized in formal university engineering courses. The MSc in Transportation Planning and Engineering at the University of Southampton, England, is now addressing these concerns as an element in its ‘Transportation Planning’ topic. Course tutor Nick Hounsell and visiting lecturer John Schoon state that students from a number of nations are showing

increased interest in this area. For further information, contact Melanie Hallford, Programme Administrator, at mh6@soton.ac.uk.

→ Submit a Statement of Interest to Host TRANSED in 2013

Institutions or agencies with an interest in hosting the TRANSED conference in 2013 are invited to contact the International section of TRB’s Committee on Accessible Transportation and Mobility by contacting the Co-Chairs: Ann Frye at Ann@Frye.demon.co.uk or Tom Rickert at tom@globalride-sf.org.

→ Share Research Needs with TRB

Would new research studies be helpful to you or others in your country to further the goal of improving access and mobility? For example, is there a need for more research on the types of vehicles or equipment that can best transport seniors and persons with disabilities in developing countries, or about ‘best practices’ when it comes to actually implementing national accessible transport policies? The Transportation Research Board (TRB) in the USA, part of the National Academy of Sciences, sponsors research on a wide variety of transportation topics. This past year, TRB has created a new database to provide input on areas of needed study to researchers in the USA and around the world. Readers are invited to send a brief description of the topic and the type of research that should be done, for possible inclusion in this database. Contact Tom Rickert, a member of TRB’s Committee on Accessible Transportation and Mobility, at tom@globalride-sf.org, with a copy to Russell Thatcher at rththatcher@transystems.com.

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News and Notes from Around the World

- **Argentina:** The city of Mar del Plata initiated service in May with two lift-equipped mini-buses, with plans to expand the fleet to provide service every 30 minutes on key routes. Diego Camerucci, a disability activist who promoted the program, cautioned transit officials to provide good driver training. "Accessibility is more than a lift," he noted. (Report from Angel Nestor Croci)

- **Belgium:** AEI refers transit planners to Europe's COST 349: *Accessibility of Coaches and Long Distance Buses for People with Reduced Mobility*, for downloading at www.bestgroup.cc/cost349. See the excellent diagrams of bus and terminal access features on pages 11-51.

- **Canada:** The World Conference of Rehabilitation International will be held in Québec, August 25-28. Go to www.riquebec2008.org for information.

- **Colombia:** Transport planners interested in initiating accessible Bus Rapid Transit Systems in small and medium-size cities are invited to correspond with the Manager of Pereira, Colombia's, new system. Contact Monica Vanegas at mvanegasb@megabus.gov.co.

- **Costa Rica & Nicaragua:** Spanish-speaking readers are referred to new publications of Handicap International and the Inter-American Institute on Disability and Inclusive Development: *For an Accessible and Inclusive World (Por un Mundo Accesible e Inclusivo)* and a *Basic Manual on Inclusive Development (Manual Básico sobre el Desarrollo Inclusivo)*, both developed by Luis Fernando Astorga Gatjens of Costa Rica and published in Nicaragua. Information at www.centroamericainclusiva.com or luferrag@ice.co.cr.

- **Cuba:** National accessibility norms have been upgraded during the past year, according to a report from Cuba's Ministry of Transport. Contact villa.ta@mitrans.transnet.cu.

- **India:** Delhi's initial 6 km Bus Rapid Transit line is operating as a trial, with six more accessible BRT corridors in the planning stage awaiting evaluation of the first line, according to the Transport Innovator. The photo (above right) of a test bus in Delhi, courtesy of Sanjeev Sachdeva of SAMARTHYA, shows the advantages of having floor-level boarding and well-designed, high-contrast handrails to assist this passenger – and all others – to use the system. . . . The Delhi Transit Corporation intends to incorporate a range of access improvements in its new bus shelters in response to advocacy by Sminu Jindal of "Svaya," a disability NGO. (Report courtesy of Kavita Agrawal & Scott Rains). . . . Drivers of Delhi's 4,000 privately

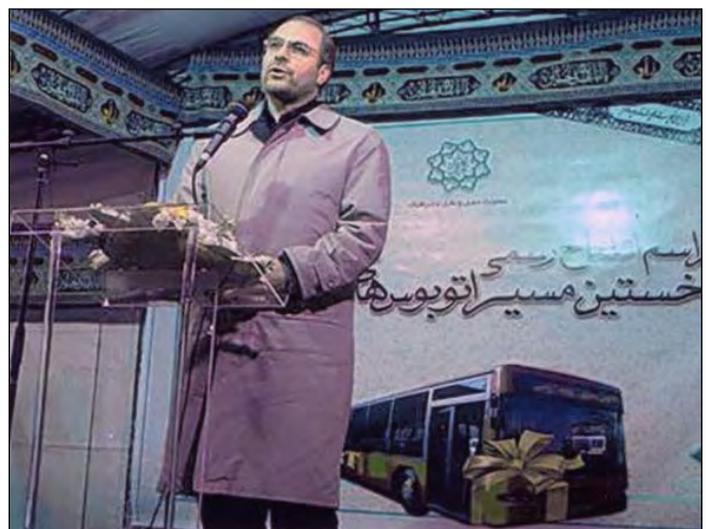


Passenger boarding a New Delhi BRT bus

owned "Blue Line" buses have been involved in the deaths of more than 300 people in accidents during the past five years, according to a running tally kept by the Hindustan Times. . . . India's Civil Aviation regulations have been amended to better ensure a barrier-free environment for disabled passengers in airports and aircraft, according to a report in The Hindu cited by Disability News India.

- **Iran:** Tehran's first Bus Rapid Transit line "allows the disabled to use buses," according to the Director of the Tehran Bus Company at an inauguration ceremony in January attended by municipal officials and the

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Tehran's Mayor at Inauguration Ceremony

– Photo from Tehran web site

News and Notes

(continued from page 7)

Islamic City Council. Speakers noted that the new line will follow international standards and has taken account of Brazilian and Chinese experience. The line will feature 108 articulated buses and serve as a model for future expansion.

- **Kenya:** A 25% reduction in deaths caused by Kenya's 44,000 mini-bus *matatus* has been attributed to newly required speed governors, seat belts, and putting drivers on salary to avoid reckless and competitive driving that had made it impossible for disabled or elderly passengers to board, according to an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

- **The Netherlands:** A European Disability Workshop will look at best accessibility practices at a forum in Amsterdam, June 30-July 4, reports Ann Frye of the conference planning committee.

- **Paraguay:** In a blow to accessibility, the Supreme Court ruled against an ordinance that would prohibit turnstiles which block seniors, disabled passengers, and others attempting to board buses entering Asunción. (Report from Julio Fretes)

- **Peru:** San Isidro recently became the first district in Peru to pass a municipal ordinance requiring that public space and public buildings be accessible to its citizens. Sponsors of the new norms hope that they will serve as a model for other districts and provinces in Peru. An ordinance to regulate parking for persons with disabilities, including the issuance of parking permits, is also in the works. . . . Recommendations have been forwarded to Protransporte in Lima to enhance access features of a planned BRT line. (Reports from José Isola)

- **United Kingdom:** Revised accessibility norms for small buses in the UK are now available at www.dptac.gov.uk/pubs/smallbus2007/index.htm#06. The norms include helpful diagrams of relevance to all countries.

- **USA:** Readers wanting to learn more about access to airports are encouraged to go to a site produced by Harry Wolfe, at www.elderairtravel.com. . . . And those with a special interest in universal design are referred to the Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access as www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea. . . . Michael Winter of the USA's Federal Transit Administration has presented accessible transit principles at recent meetings with experts in Korea and Vietnam. He is also working with Project ACTION in Washington, DC, to bring international disability leaders to a forum in the USA. . . . Access Exchange International engaged in a telephone seminar on accessible transportation with sixteen Spanish-speaking leaders of disability agencies from seven Latin American countries. The event was hosted in March by Mobility International in

Eugene, Oregon, as part of their leadership training for outstanding advocates from disability agencies. Prof. Kate Hunter-Zaworski of Oregon State Univ. also served as a resource person. . . . Planners of accessible door-to-door services may go to www.trb.org/news/blurb_detail.asp?id=8717 for a report analyzing the use of taxis for all passengers alongside vans specialized just for those with disabilities.

- **Vietnam:** Plans are moving ahead for accessible BRT corridors in Hanoi, incorporating the accessibility guidelines compiled by Tom Rickert of AEI for the World Bank. It is hoped the system will be up and running for Hanoi's Millennium celebration. The city was founded in 1010. . . . The Vietnam Railway Corporation is currently researching access guidelines with a view toward making stations in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and other key cities accessible by the end of this year. Funds have also been allocated to manufacture a prototype accessible rail car. . . . And 10,000 transit staff in Vietnam have received training to enhance their services to disabled passengers. (Reports from Gerhard Menckhoff of the World Bank and Nguyen Bich Nga of VNAH/Hanoi)

- **Sri Lanka:**



Persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka struggle up a path (bottom) or down the steps of a temple (top). These photos from the Central Council of Disabled Persons remind us that *most* disabled people in developing countries are only beginning the long path toward "mobility for all." (Photos from Raja Marasinghe in Bandarawela, www.ccodp.org)

