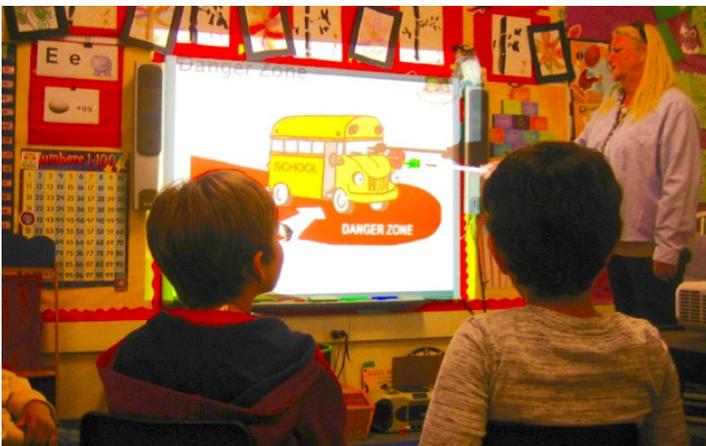


Celebrating 25 years



Accessible Transportation Around the World

The Newsletter of
Access Exchange International
June 2016



- AEI photo by Tom Rickert

School bus drivers and staff are the teachers "Bus in the Classroom:" Could it solve problems in less-wealthy countries?

by Tom Rickert

I recently returned from a two-day visit to the Newport-Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) in southern California to look at some new concepts in training students with disabilities to more safely get to and from school while learning independent living skills. My host was Pete Meslin, the district's Director of Transportation and a nationally known figure in the school bus world.

The lessons are not taught by the teachers. Rather, they are taught by school bus [To Page 2 →](#)



Open Doors Special Education Center in Jos, Nigeria
- Photo courtesy of Joanne Umolu, Director

Heads of schools in developing regions highlight transport issues

Our guide-in-preparation, *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries*, is the largest single project we have tackled in our 25-year history. Following two years of work, we intend to release this publication by early 2017 and use it as the platform to (1) help quantify transportation-to-school issues in order to encourage major institutions to take action, and (2) promote practical ways to address one of the most intractable problems that impact the poorest of the poor on this planet.

We have gathered data from many sources. We have co-authored a survey with Missouri State University (USA) with transportation data now on hand from more than fifty heads of schools in Africa. We have also conducted in-person interviews in Pakistan, Mexico, Tanzania, Kenya, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. And we have completed draft case studies from a dozen countries. Some comments received:

"**Cost is always the main issue for transportation in urban areas, although in some rural areas the main issue may be availability of transport.**" - Dr. Joanne Umolu, Open Doors Special Education Center, Jos, Nigeria. See photo above and box on page 3.

Beyond cost, a major concern is that parents living in poverty are unable to earn a living and accompany their children to school on a vehicle at the same time.

"**The parents of children with disabilities had to personally assist their children to the schools. When using a means of transportation, To page 3 →**

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NMUSD's eighty buses transport more than 4,000 students every day, including 500 children to special education classes in a district with 35 schools serving 22,000 students. Driver training includes 20 hours of classroom instruction and 20 hours behind the wheel. - AEI photo by Tom Rickert

"Bus in the Classroom" - from Page 1

drivers and transportation staff who are already familiar with their job. Acting as educators, they are able to "bridge the gap" between the worlds of transportation and education by serving as a link between the classroom and the school bus. Here are some of my impressions.

- The kids loved the colored slides and the state-of-the-art teaching methods with heavy use of pictures and other visual aids. The photo on page 1 shows them singing a song called "Stay out of the danger zone," which may sound dull but is quite different with a Caribbean calypso beat!

- The result appears to be better behavior on the school bus, which in turn means less need for attendants to monitor behaviors that may be found, for example, with some children with intellectual disabilities. Bullying and similar behaviors can be reduced. Transferred to developing countries, this could be a game changer for parents who otherwise would be required to travel with their children to and from school. More often than not, mothers of kids with disabilities head up their households. They often need to work to put food on the table. They cannot serve as bus attendants and may have to keep their child out of school as a result.



Some transport staff at the NMUSD: From left, Pete Meslin, a new member of the team preparing our guide, with Robert Bremmer, Kimberly Egnotovich, and Francine Harms. - Photo by Tom Rickert

- Independent living is the goal of the program. Many schools in the USA keep on picking up students with disabilities at the curb outside their home when some of these students (with better training) could handle a less restrictive environment by walking to a bus stop where several children can board at once. This in turn lowers the cost of transportation for the school district. A win-win situation for everyone!

Taking our message to Washington DC



Janett Jiménez, Pete Meslin, Tom Rickert, and Richard Schultze presented issues of transportation for children with disabilities at AEI's 17th International Roundtable on Accessible Transportation, held in January in Washington at facilities provided by the American Public Transportation Association (photo). The team also met with colleagues at the USA's Transportation Research Board, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education.

Other meetings are helping us input into our transport-to-school guide now in preparation. Janett Jiménez from Mexico joined Pete Meslin at a Transporting Students with Disabilities conference in Louisville, Kentucky, in March. And Gretel Silvestre is journeying from the Dominican Republic to Bolivia this month to speak at a special education conference organized by Richard Schultze.



Ready to go in rural Mexico

This photo shows an "all terrain spider wheelchair" designed by David Werner so that other children can assist Tonio, a nine-year-old with muscular dystrophy, to get to school over rough terrain in rural Mexico. Ideas for easier walking (or wheeling) to school are high on our agenda. - Photo by permission of HealthWrights. For more information, go to www.healthwrights.org.

The cost of transportation, distance from school, and unsafe footpaths stop kids with disabilities from getting to school

Continued from page 1

they had to support their children to climb a rickshaw, (or) bus; . . . hence, the cost (was) double in myriad cases." - Amin Amir Andani, The Rickshaw Project, Karachi, Pakistan

Behind the issue of the burden *on* parents are those "worst case" situations when the parents in some areas *become* the burden, with little interest in getting their child with a disability to school.

"A child who is born lame is sometimes considered a curse and in many cases she or he may be killed or mis-

treated by the parents. . . . Parents tend to hide them in their houses because they do not want it known that they have a child with a disability." - Brother Patrick Misiati, reporting from the Bobleo Center for children in western Kenya

Some startling data from our survey

- **Forty-three day schools and boarding schools from seven African countries, serving 7,076 students with disabilities, estimated that their combined attendance would increase by an average of 24% if their schools had adequate transportation available.**

- **62% of African schools reported that footpaths to school were not usable by students with disabilities, noting that they were not safely separated from the road (88%) or were "otherwise unsafe" (74%).**

When a child must transfer to another school -



Dr. Umolu shared with us the story of one student, Blessing, a 17 year old Nigerian girl who had lost a leg to leprosy that was cured earlier in her life (photo center). She writes: "While Blessing was at Open Doors she made rapid progress academically and learned to read and write well enough to enter secondary school. However, it was felt best that she move in with a caring relative (in a distant village) as she was faced with stigmatization and cruelty in her living situation.

We looked forward to hearing that Blessing was settling in well in the village and going to the local secondary school as arranged. To our great disappointment, a month later we learned that she is unable to go to school because it is not possible to wheel her to the school due to the condition of the road. We are only hoping that some form of transport will be worked out in the village and that Blessing will soon be back to school." - Photo by permission of Dr. Joanne Umolu, Open Doors Centre

Unsafe transportation often faces children getting to school in Africa



- Photo from Mmegi News, Botswana

What to do about overcrowded and unsafe vehicles that were never intended to serve for passenger transport? The photo above shows the aftermath when 135 secondary students boarding at Matsha College in Botswana were transported in an open cattle truck with only two rear tires to return to their rural villages between terms this past November. Eight students were killed and 125 were injured and hospitalized.

Parents in many developing countries have to balance their desire that their children receive an education with their fear for their safety while traveling to and from school. Safety is of even greater concern for parents of children with disabilities and is a major reason why such children may never enroll in schools, especially those living in rural areas. - Source: Mmegi News

**Large vehicle or small,
universal design matters**



A national-level assessment of BRT accessibility in Mexico

A consumer-protection agency in Mexico (called "El Poder del Consumidor" in Spanish) has pioneered an assessment of sixteen bus rapid transit lines in eight Mexican cities and states.

The agency has rated access with a particular focus on accessibility compliance at BRT stations, public space around the stations, operating issues, bus access, and transfers between transport modes. The results will be presented on June 22 in Mexico City in a document titled "Accessibility Diagnosis of BRT Systems in Mexico." (Information from Janett Jiménez)



Pakistan's Accessible Cycle Design Challenge announces the winner

Persons with disabilities in Pakistan often get around using hand-powered three-wheeled tricycles. But poor design has been a big problem. Help is on the way, thanks to the winning design by Taufeeq Elahi Diju (above), selected from sixty entries in the contest. The winner was to be announced at the Karachi Marriott Hotel on June 2. AEI's Executive Director and other colleagues were part of the panel to select the winning design, with features such as improved storage areas and an adjustable foot rest along with modern styling. The contest was organized by Pakistan's Network of Organizations Working with People with Disabilities. (Information from Amin Amir Andani of NOWPDP)



A quarter century ago . . .

Tom Rickert stepped down from his job as manager of accessible transportation for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency – then known as "the Muni" – in order to found Access Exchange International. At that time, with a couple exceptions, there were no examples of accessible public transportation in the developing world. A lot has happened since. Thanks to colleagues, Board members, volunteers, and donors from around the world, you are reading our fiftieth newsletter.

Access Exchange International

112 San Pablo Ave., San Francisco, CA 94127, USA
www.globalride-sf.org
tom@globalride-sf.org
telephone: 1-415-661-6355



Board of Directors Top: Peter Straus, Lucy Crain (Treasurer), Marc Soto (Vice-Pres.), Richard Weiner (President), Susan Worts, & Ike Nnaji. Seated: Cheryl Damico, Bruce Oka (Secretary), & Tom Rickert (Executive Director).

- Photo by Susan Rickert from January 2016 meeting.

AEI is tax-exempt under Article 501(c)(3) of the USA's Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to our work from USA donors are tax-deductible. Each dollar of donations is more than matched by cost sharing. Financial compilations are available.

Publications compiled by AEI in English and Spanish over the years

| Name and location | Comments |
|--|--|
| Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries IN PREPARATION FOR PUBLICATION BY JANUARY 2017 | Richly illustrated with case studies from Asia, Africa, and the Americas, this pioneering publication will address a missing link when it comes to getting mobility-impaired children to school. |
| Paratransit for Mobility-impaired Persons in Developing Regions: Starting up and scaling up www.globalride-sf.org/paratransit/Guide.pdf | An introduction to all aspects of door-to-door "demand-response" transportation for persons with disabilities in less-wealthy countries. (2012, 88 pages) |
| Transit Access Training Toolkit http://go.worldbank.org/MQUMJCL1W1 | Compiled for the World Bank. Training tools for bus, taxi, and other drivers. (2009, 31 pages) Also available in Portuguese. |
| Bus Rapid Transit Accessibility Guidelines http://go.worldbank.org/MQUMJCL1W1 | Compiled for the World Bank. Access to pedestrian ways, stations, and BRT vehicles (2007, 43 pages) |
| Technical and operational challenges to inclusive Bus Rapid Transit http://go.worldbank.org/MQUMJCL1W1 | Compiled for the World Bank. Addresses potential barriers to access such as pedestrian bridges, station-to-bus gaps, or poorly designed sidewalks and crossings. (2010, 42 pages) |
| Mobility for All: Accessible Transportation Around the World http://www.independentliving.org/mobility/mobility.pdf | "A guide to making transportation accessible for persons with disabilities and elders in countries around the world." (1998, 26 pages) |
| Making Access Happen: A guide for advocates and planners www.independentliving.org/mobility/rickert200302.pdf | "How to promote and plan access for persons with disabilities and elders to buses, trains, taxis, and other modes of transport." Go to www.globalride-sf.org/espanol.html for the Spanish version (2011, 30 pages) |
| Transport for All: What Should We Measure? globalride-sf.org/pdf/what_should_we_measure.pdf | "Comments on the use of indicators and performance measures for inclusive public transport in developing regions." (2005, 20 pages) English only. |

News from AEI and our colleagues

CONGRATULATIONS to *Janett Jiménez* in Mexico City, part of the team that produced Mexico City's recently published Technical Accessibility Norms (Manual de Normas Técnicas de Accesibilidad). . . . Congratulations to *Mary Crass* (France) and also to *Judy Shanley* (USA) upon their appointment as the new co-chairs of the International Subcommittee of TRB's Committee on Accessible Transportation and Mobility. They inherit the good work of the outgoing co-chairs, *Ann Frye* (U.K.) and *Nina Frid* (Canada).

APPRECIATION: Keeping nearly 1,900 addresses in order from more than eighty countries is a big job! The person to thank is *Maureen Blumenthal*, who has volunteered in our office once a month over the past eight years. . . . Special thanks to *Gerhard and Pati Menckhoff* for hosting our Executive Director during his annual visits each January to Washington DC. . . . And our appreciation to *Yoshito Dobashi* (photo) for his research on our behalf to document key issues in Japan's provision of transportation for children with disabilities. . . . Thanks also to *Eli Noyes* of Alligator



Planet here in San Francisco for his revised illustration of school transport for children with disabilities, found on the home page of AEI's website. . . . And we thank Carol Bloom for her donation honoring *Richard Weiner*, and Anne & Peter Silverberg for their donation in honor of *Susan Lubeck's* and *Ann Silverberg's* birthdays.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES: The USA's Transportation Research Board is sponsoring an International Conference on Demand Responsive Transportation in Breckenridge, Colorado, September 26-28. For information, go to www.trb.org/Conferences/DRT2016.aspx. . . . AEI is planning its 18th International Roundtable on Inclusive Transportation in Washington DC for Thursday morning, January 12, 2017. . . . Those with a special interest in transportation for children with disabilities in the USA are invited to go to www.stnonline.com to learn about the Transporting Students with Disabilities Conference near Dallas, Texas, March 17-22, 2017.

A MEMORIAL DONATION has been received from Tom & Susan Rickert, in memory of *Walter Spillum*, a long-time friend of the disability movement in Japan who helped host Tom and Sue at meetings in Japan in 2000. The donation was also in memory of *Bill Kortum* and *Natalie Rogers*.

**A list of the donors who sustained our work during the past year.
(We could not have done it without you!)**

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**Every \$1 donated to AEI in 2015
was more than matched in dona-
ted staff time and services for
our work.**

News & Notes from Around the World

LATIN AMERICA Brazil: The city of Goiânia is moving toward a 100% accessible bus fleet, joining Brazilian cities such as Curitiba and Uberlândia in setting a standard for other South American cities. (Rmtc Goiânia). . . . Chile: Santiago continues to enlarge its inclusive bus rapid transit fleet (SiBRT).



A "super trunk line" is planned for Caracas Avenue in Bogotá, including an elevated metro above the BRT corridor (photo Civico.com). Meanwhile, the city of Cartagena



has initiated service on its much-delayed BRT line, rounding out the initiation of accessible BRT services in all of Colombia's largest cities. (Photo in El Tiempo showing ramped entry).

Ecuador: The expansion of accessible taxi services in Latin America continues to be impressive as one city after another initiates a ramped fleet. Ecuador is no exception. Fifty ramped taxis have been added to Quito's accessible fleet. Fares are one half the regular



cost (discapadadesecuador.org). Five accessible vans have also been put into service in Cuenca, Ecuador (El Mercurio). In addition, both public and private transport agencies in rural areas in northern Ecuador (photo above) are teaming up to offer services to persons with disabilities according to an agreement be-

tween agencies representing persons with disabilities, transport, and the national police. The agreement puts into place preferential fares and special training of public transport drivers. The focus appears to be on assistance to medical appointments (www.metroecuador.com). These news items from Ecuador are referred to us by our colleague Gretel Silvestre.

ASIA Connecting up the "islands of accessibility" in India: "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new push for accessibility has galvanized a disability rights movement in a country with a notably poor record on inclusive infrastructure," states a March 21 article in the Washington Post. **Modi's Accessible India Campaign was launched in December with a focus on establishing timelines and providing funds for removing barriers in the environment.** A Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities is charged with developing trained accessibility auditors to document what needs to be done at railway stations, airports, public buildings, and elsewhere. One agency with a role in carrying out the new Accessible India Campaign is Svayam's Centre for Inclusive Environments in New Delhi. Ms. Sminu Jindal, managing director of Jindal SAW Ltd and founder of Svayam, became a wheelchair user at age 11. Writing in the Huffington Post in February, she notes that "The Metro is accessible yet last mile connectivity from people's homes is missing." This is only one of a multitude of examples of islands of accessibility amidst seas of obstacles, but Modi's new campaign may be part of the long-term answer. AEI's Executive Director visited New Delhi on three occasions in recent years and we wish success to all the agencies in this campaign as they face the task of improving access in the world's second largest nation. . . . New bus rapid transit corridors in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad in western India are winning national acclaim. The systems feature closed stations with sliding doors, level boarding, and other features that enhance security and ease of travel for all, including seniors and passengers with disabilities (ITDP).

Pakistan: Amin Amir Andani of NOWPDP informs us that advocacy is going forward to seek full accessibility for five bus rapid transit lines planned in Karachi. An initial 26 km section is under construction. . . . Taiwan has passed a law requiring public transport operators to provide accessible services for passengers with disabilities (FocusTaiwan). . . . Our colleague Rex Luk in Hong Kong reports that 200 accessible taxis are being added to their fleet during the current year, up from only six vehicles in 2008. . . . In Singapore, all 750 Tower Transit bus drivers are now required to receive disability awareness and sensitivity training (StraitsTimes). Uber states it has launched **To Page 8 →**

News & Notes

(continued from Page 7)

a service for some persons with disabilities who do not need to remain in a wheelchair while travelling (Channel News Asia). . . . The Kiwi Transport Survey in New Zealand noted some transport shortcomings for mobility-challenged persons. Although many respondents felt that vehicle standards were adequate for everyone, only 40% felt the same about footpaths, and only 10% felt that New Zealanders had good data about who used footpaths, who didn't, and why people didn't use them. . . . This prototype accessible three-wheeled "tuk tuk" has been inspired by Megan Lee Smith, a disability consultant to UNICEF Cambodia, along with associated agencies, notes Subhash Vashishth in New Delhi (photo below).



EUROPE Major progress in bus and trolley-bus accessibility is reported in Russia, according to Valeria Sviatkina, our staff person some twenty years ago in Moscow. She writes that Evgeniy Mihaylov, the director of Moscow's bus and tram transport known as Mosgortrans, reports that **a program to renovate the entire Moscow surface transportation fleet started five years ago and is moving along well, with 75% of buses and 33% of trolley-buses now replaced by low-floored vehicles. All of Moscow's municipal buses are scheduled to become more accessible by 2018.** Moscow's underground Metro has installed a strip of lights along platforms to assist passengers with low vision. Newer buildings are also becoming more accessible, although much remains to be done on Moscow's older buildings, as is true in most of the world's cities. . . . Contact mary.crass@oecd.org for a list of free guides published in print by the European Conference of Ministers of Transport some years ago. The guides include accessibility to trains, buses, transit stops, taxis, pedestrian ways and more. Get these valuable publications while they last!

United Kingdom: Our colleague Ann Frye in the UK notes that there is a large body of European law setting technical standards for accessibility to bus and rail services. In addition, a European Accessibility Act is

moving toward implementation and will promote design for all at many levels, including more accessible ticket kiosks at transit stations. . . . The International Transport Forum held a roundtable in Paris in March on the economic benefits of improved accessibility to transport systems, which will hopefully enhance the ITF's commitment to the needs of Europeans with disabilities.

Turkey: Four hundred accessible buses have been added to Istanbul's fleet of more than 6,000 buses, writes our colleague Ad van Herk (photo at right).



"Access for all" in Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile. . . **Major South American cities adapt airborne cable-driven gondolas**

Think ski lifts on steroids! Sometimes called "ropeways," several Latin American cities are adapting wheelchair-accessible cable car systems to improve mobility in cities such as Medellín, Colombia; La Paz, Bolivia; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



These systems are accessible to wheelchair users and other disabled persons because the gondola floor is level with station platforms. Gondolas go temporarily "off line" at stations, enabling passengers to board the stationary passenger cabin. Some cities have several cable lines with multiple stations. - Photo above taken by Tom Rickert in Medellín, Colombia, April 2005.

We invite our readers to consider a donation to help us fund world-wide dissemination and followup of our guide-in-preparation: *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries.*

A quick introduction to our current focus on this topic is available at our blog posted on the website of the Global Partnership for Education at <http://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/transportation-school-children-disabilities-closing-gap>. The blog is co-authored by Tom Rickert (USA) and Janett Jiménez (Mexico).