

Meetings in Mexico focus on common concerns of AEI's border initiative

Mexican and American colleagues review school transport issues facing children with disabilities



An international team meets with educators, parents and a student in Tijuana to define shared needs.
Photo by Tom Rickert for AEI

Accessible Transportation Around the World



The Newsletter of
Access Exchange International
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AEI's international team reaches out to educators, transport experts, others

Mexican and American associates of Access Exchange International met with principals, teachers, parents, students, and transportation leaders in Tijuana, Mexico, in late May.

The goal: To learn about transportation and related issues facing children with disabilities in the state of Baja California as part of AEI's larger initiative to promote more and better school transport in the border regions of both the USA and Mexico. Subject to the availability of funding, we plan to first publish an analysis of the complex issues facing students and their parents on both sides of the border. We will focus on school transportation, which often is "the elephant in the room"

when it comes to whether or not a child with a disability will attend school. Our analysis will also estimate the size of hidden populations of children with special needs on both [To Page 3 →](#)

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Building bridges of cooperation between our countries

Editorial: What of the "disappeared" children in the USA?

by Pete Meslin

Former Director of Transportation, Newport-Mesa Unified School District (retired)

In these times of political threats we are often left wondering what will happen next. Unfortunately, we tend to lose sight of the obvious. There are children on both sides of the border who, for many reasons, go without any education, let alone a quality one. Children with special needs are even more likely to suffer this fate. Parents frequently find that they have to make difficult choices and education for their child takes a lesser focus. In many cases this population is undercounted, under cared for, and unfortunately undereducated. This group of children are quite literally the "disappeared children."

It is difficult to assess how many children are amongst these "disappeared." We do know that in the USA a large share of these children are the children of people who are undocumented. When a child has a disability requiring extraordinary measures, parents are reluctant to draw attention to their child if they are themselves not in a legal status. These parents reason, rightfully or not, that unnecessary attention to their student's status might draw attention to their immigration status and will ultimately lead to their deportation. In the U.S., parents could be separated and deported if they advocate for their children too loudly. The students on the U.S. side tend to just "disappear." One day the child is in school and the next day he or she is gone. This occurs even though educators are in general concerned with a student's education and not with their parents immigration status.

A student in a similar situation on the Mexican side of the border might not receive the educational program that is best for him/her. In this case, parents might actually advocate for the transportation and other tools their child needs but due to monetary constraints the decision might be taken to spend the money elsewhere. The students on the Mexican side may withdraw from school or may not register for school in the first place. These students don't technically "disappear." They just go to school on the fringes - attending part time or never going to school.

We need to estimate the number of children with disabilities that have "disappeared" on both sides of the border – and why they are missing – if we are to recommend ways to meet their needs to get to school. Transportation to and from school is a critical issue, and often is the single most significant issue in meeting their education needs. These students require our attention and we must take action.



How does this work fit into our wider concerns?

The map above shows the four USA border states (California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas) and the six Mexican border states (Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas.) Nearly one hundred million people live in these ten states. The map also depicts the many "twin cities" found opposite each other, for example San Diego and Calexico are opposite Tijuana and Mexicali in the states of California and Baja California respectively. This newsletter features our meetings in Tijuana.

Most school children and youth on both sides of the border are Hispanic. Indeed, the world's two countries with the highest number of Spanish-speakers are Mexico and the USA. Our interest is focused on the approximately 800,000 Hispanic children who are identified with disabilities in these ten states, plus the many who are not identified and often are not enrolled in any school. And our interest is further focused on school transportation as a major factor in creating and resolving issues of their educational attainment.

We are faced with a daunting task. In spite of all the headlines about "the border," we ask you to consider a donation to help us address this task. It is a task that we think all of us can support! We need your help to convert our plans and proposals into reality.

Learning about the issues from our Mexican colleagues

(Continued from Page 1)

sides of the border and the impact of poverty, migration, deportation, and other issues on school transportation. We will then promote actions to carry out recommendations by USA and Mexican stakeholders.

While in Tijuana we met with personnel at two schools, with the mother of a child with a disability who had been deported from the USA, and with public transport experts. The "AEI team" was composed of our Executive Director, Tom Rickert; Janett Jiménez Santos of Mexico City, who organized the Tijuana meetings; and Pete Meslin, retired director of transportation at the Newport-Mesa Unified School District in southern California. Paola Chenillo Alazraki, of Mexico's federal Dept. of Public Education, joined us for meetings with educators at the two schools.

The first meeting was with an inclusive school for students, typically of high school age, shown in the photo on the front page and headed up by Rocío Arriaga, its director. The second meeting was at a special education school, mainly for primary level students, where we met with the group shown below.



Our team, joined by teachers and a parent, meets with Andrés Olguin, Director of a CAM (Center for Multiple Assistance) in the Mesa de Otay section of Tijuana. The nearest public bus stop is around a mile from the school. There are no accessible school buses.



The photo at left is from our meeting with Elizabeth Cerezo (right), shown at her home in Tijuana with Janett Jiménez. Ms. Cerezo once lived in Los Angeles with her son with cerebral palsy. Her son received specialized medical assistance in the USA until they were deported to Mexico.

A closer look at transportation in Tijuana

Our meetings at schools were followed up by discussions with Tijuana's largest public transportation company, Azul y Blanco SA de C.V., with 460 drivers and 330 vehicles. Children with disabilities, if they are to get to schools in Tijuana, mainly travel to school by walking (if able) or public transportation, as most parents are not wealthy enough to afford a car. In contrast, cities in the USA have (1) public transportation on regular fixed routes, similar to Tijuana, plus (2) a school bus system, and (3) a door-to-door paratransit system mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act.



From left: Arturo Arce Quiroz, President of Azul y Blanco; Héctor José Marquez Adame, Secretary of Azul y Blanco; Tom Rickert; Pete Meslin; Azelia Esparza, mother of a daughter with a disability, and Janett Jiménez Santos.

Our final meeting was with Michelle Rubio (photo right), with the Department of Sustainable Mobility. Planners in Tijuana hope to improve services for the 1.8 million residents of their metropolitan area and are preparing an "integrated plan for sustainable urban mobility," aligned with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, in order to develop a better picture of the task that lies ahead. In terms of walking to school, only 38% of neighborhood streets have accessible sidewalks. These and other urban infrastructure issues point to a crisis both in walking to school and also in accessing whatever public transport may be available.



Transportation to school is a disaster for many children with disabilities in Tijuana. This is often true for many children in the USA as well (see editorial on Page 2). That is the bad news. The good news is that people of good will on both sides of the border are willing to do something about it.

AEI offers flyers to promote school transport for special-needs children

Thanks to art work provided to AEI by Eli Noyes, a series of posters and flyers is available on our website to download at <http://www.globalride-sf.org>. All are in both English and in Spanish. The one-page flyers are for distribution to parents, teachers, and others to assist children with disabilities to more safely walk or ride to school, as well as to encourage methods to increase the availability of new or used vehicles where transportation does not currently exist.



"Bridging the Gap between Home and School"

Innovative programs allow many students with disabilities to attend schools

TRAVEL TRAINING FOR STUDENTS CAN EXPAND THEIR TRANSPORT OPTIONS

Would you like your students to develop more transportation independence skills? Consider teaching a "Bus in the Classroom" program to your students. Such a program will help students to:

- Learn transportation-related life skills
- Improve safety
- Improve school transport behaviors
- Build self esteem
- Reinforce learned behaviors/skills
- May reduce parent's requirements to ride with the student

In the USA, this program is known for its ability to teach students with special needs. It can be relevant to different types of vehicles in other countries as well. This could be a skill-building opportunity for many children and could improve students' chances of riding a bus or using public transportation "on their own" as they grow older.

For further information:

- Visit Access Exchange International (AEI) at <https://www.globalride-sf.org/> and click the guide, "Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school." Go to Section 9 on "Travel training for children with disabilities," as well as the case study on "Bus in the Classroom" at the Newport-Mesa school district.
- Visit the Newport-Mesa school district at www.nmusd.us/BIC for a video about "Bus in the Classroom." Contact Pete Meslin at petemeslin@gmail.com for more information.
- Brought to you as a public service by AEI, a non-profit NGO in San Francisco, USA.
- We encourage reproduction and translation of this flyer.

Illustrations by Eli Noyes

Why should we think and act globally?

Countries, cities, school districts, and transportation agencies can learn a lot by copying each other. If something doesn't work out, look at other cities (or countries) to see if they have a better idea! We are applying this principle to the task of improving the ways children with disabilities can walk or ride to school, and – with our border initiative – we hope that a better understanding of concerns around the USA-Mexican border will result in a better understanding of how to handle border issues in other parts of the world. Getting children to school is not rocket science, but it does challenge us to think and act creatively.



Children with disabilities boarding Eden Foundation's vehicles to go to school in Taiwan - Courtesy of Eileen Lu

Available by August

Eden Social Welfare Foundation to publish AEI's "Bridging the Gap" guide in Chinese

The Eden Social Welfare Foundation, a major provider of school transportation in Taiwan, has announced plans to publish a Chinese version of AEI's *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries*, on or before August of this year. Eden is known to our readers as the sponsor of this past November's highly successful 15th International Conference on Mobility and Transport (TRANSED) in Taiwan. We also thank Dr. Wan-Ping Lee of the Dept. of Social Work of Soochow University in Taipei for working with Eden to assure the high quality of the Chinese translation.

The new guide fills a major language gap: With the Chinese version joining the English, Spanish, and Hindi versions, the guide is now available in the world's four most spoken languages. A Japanese version has also been published. The 150-page publication may be downloaded at <http://www.globalride-sf.org> in all languages from the home page of AEI's website.

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Meslin, Rickert represent AEI

Transportation for Students with Disabilities (TSD) Conference held in Dallas



Pete Meslin, Tom Rickert, and John Landherr, President of A-Z Bus Sales and a supporter of AEI's work to promote school transportation.

For the second year in a row, Tom Rickert and Pete Meslin have provided updates on AEI's work to promote school transportation in developing regions at the annual Transportation for Students with Disabilities conference and expo held in Dallas. In March, Rickert and Meslin presented a session on "Cross-Border Cooperation Between Education & Transportation Agencies."

Conversations with several transportation specialists and other special education personnel suggested a pattern of spotty school attendance by Hispanic children and youth affected by the turmoil of migration and displacement to and within the USA, reflected in comments from practitioners in California, Colorado, New York, Minnesota, and Maryland.

Our thanks to Maureen Blumenthal

A luncheon was recently held at the home of our Executive Director honoring the fifteen years of volunteer work for AEI by Maureen Blumenthal, known as Mo by her friends. Mo has specialized in overseeing AEI's mailing list of nearly two thousand stakeholders in eighty countries. She grew up in Congo and Zimbabwe, and when her parents moved to South Africa she went on to become their water skiing champion "back in the day" prior to moving to the UK and then the United States. We cannot thank her enough for all she has done on behalf of AEI.



Partial view of attendees from eight countries in the Americas, Asia, and Europe. - photo by Tom Rickert

Event in Washington DC, hosted by APTA **20th Annual Roundtable sponsored by AEI (USA) and ICSA (Canada)**

AEI and ICSA sponsored their 20th annual Roundtable on accessible transportation in developing regions in January, on the margins of the annual meeting of the USA's Transportation Research Board. Once again, the American Public Transportation Association hosted the event, which has become an integral part of the weeks activities for many colleagues with its focus on public transport accessibility in less-wealthy countries.

Several presentations touched upon school transportation (or its lack), with Quentin Wodon, Lead Economist with the World Bank for Education Global Practice, leading off with an update on efforts to address growing discrepancies in educational attainment by children with and without disabilities. AEI's work on school transport is contributing to the Bank's larger considerations about this vexed issue.



From left, Subhash Vashishth (India), Sue and Tom Rickert (USA), Kit Mitchell (UK), and Quentin Wodon (World Bank). Seated: Janett Jiménez Santos (Mexico)

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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We are frugal with your donations!

Every \$1 received by AEI in 2018 was matched by \$2.27 in cost sharing. Donations in time and material included volunteer time of our staff and of colleagues working on behalf of our mission; much of the graphic design work, translation services, and financial services performed on our behalf; lodging, meals, air transportation, and meeting sites; work to assure the accuracy of our mailing list; and all utilities and office space.

Access Exchange International is a non-profit organization, tax-exempt under Article 501(c)(3) of the USA's Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to our work by USA donors are tax-deductible to the full extent permitted by law.

News and Notes from Around the World

USA: The 6th international conference on women's issues in transportation will be held in Irvine, CA, September 10-13, 2019. Go to www.trb.org for more information. . . . Our colleague Lloyd Wright sends us the photo below, by Nadir Ali, from an adaptive



bike/tricycle program in Detroit, illustrating the current innovation with bikes and trikes around the world. . . . Transportation Network Companies (TNCs: think Uber and Lyft) have business models which often leave passengers with disabilities without service. One solution that seems to be spreading is a surcharge on TNC fares in order to fund alternative services for customers left out by the TNCs.

Brazil: This long pedestrian ramp from an overpass in Belo Horizonte (photo below of the Ouro Minas station) has now been replaced by a grade-level



crossing which has made it more accessible to all passengers, including those with disabilities, notes Paula Santos of the World Resources Institute in Brazil. There was a significant increase in passengers using this station due to the shorter and safer approach. Three BRT stations are being modified to improve access and safety features prior to more extensive work on the system.



Iran: Report from Tabriz Inclusive Bus Rapid Transit Systems Expand in Iranian Cities

While we have reported on Tehran's inclusive bus rapid transit system in a previous newsletter, our colleague Iraj Soltani indicates that five other cities, including Tabriz, now have BRT systems in operation, with four other cities poised to begin construction. There are two BRT lines in Tabriz, totaling 39 stations along 18 km of corridors. Tabriz is Iran's sixth largest city, located in the northwestern part of the country.

The stations are ramped and available to wheelchair users, with wheelchair spaces found inside the vehicles. BRT in Tabriz is currently being upgraded to better serve blind patrons through tactile Braille signage as well as verbal announcements on all BRT buses announcing station stops by name.



Soltani also reports that tactile guideways (photo at right) are a common feature on Tabriz' pedestrian walkways.

- All photos for AEI by Iraj Soltani, an engineering student at a university in Tabriz.



News and Notes from Around the World

Ecuador: Government officials are gathering data to improve policies that favor transport equity



and inclusion, and plan to follow up with improvements in public transport services for passengers with disabilities, per an article in the *Diario El Telégrafo* at www.eltelegrafo.com.ec, notes Janett Jiménez (foto by *Diario El Telégrafo*).

Chile: Most access features help all bus passengers, not just those with disabilities. However, researchers at the Pontifical University of Chile have published findings that people with disabilities value such features at least twice as



much as do other passengers. A second study provides one more reason why: It turns out that the average travel time for people with disabilities to make the same trip is 30% longer, or about 18 minutes, with the biggest problem focused on transferring from one line to another. Other

findings, provided by Corporation Accessible City in Santiago, focus on three key access feature needs: (1) entrance ramps should be via the door nearest the bus driver, (2) ramps should be long enough to keep them from being too steep (not more than a 12% grade), and (3) more preferential seating is needed for persons with reduced mobility. (Data and photos from Lake Sagaris, Andrea Legarreta A., & Patricia Galilea Aranda.)

Contact AEI at tom@globalride-sf.org if you would prefer to receive the Spanish version of this newsletter.

Portugal: In Lisbon, knowledgeable persons with disabilities are now evaluating public transit stops and stations, rating accessibility according to pre-established criteria to address the entire trip chain including entering the station, boarding and alighting from vehicles, and indoor wayfinding within stations and structures. (Item from Pedro Homem de Gouveia)

Russia: Valeria Sviatkina reports that the "social taxi" system continues to expand in Russian cities. Qualifying persons with disabilities pay half the trip cost and the other half is subsidized



by city budgets. Call centers receive orders 24 hours per day. Both mini-buses (photo) and taxis are used in these systems.

Japan: Initiatives are under way in preparation for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, including the provision of training for drivers of accessible vehicles as well as setting up loading zones to assist visiting athletes with disabilities. AEI assisted a delegation from Japan which visited San Francisco this past October to investigate practices in the USA as they prepare to welcome athletes with disabilities in Tokyo. A full day of presentations was provided to our visitors by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency and by Transdev, the contractor overseeing door-to-door paratransit services in San Francisco, as well as by AEI.