Cross-Sectional Study of the Effects of Disability on the Mismatch of Desires versus Choices for Transportation Modes and Residential Location

Improve understanding of how individuals’ needs for local transportation and housing in California differ based on disability along with other characteristics including income, race, gender, household size and composition, and age.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

California Transportation (Caltrans) currently lags behind in understanding the mobility needs of disability population. By not understanding their mobility needs, Caltrans will not be able to pursue a policy to meet Caltrans missions of provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment.

This will likely be especially important in the context of California, where suburbanization of poverty in large coastal metropolitan areas, aging of the population as a whole, and high levels of dependence on private automobility (including driving oneself as well as depending on family or friends for rides) may together contribute to greater rates of social exclusion among people with disabilities.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

This project will combine qualitative and quantitative data collection efforts to improve understanding of how individuals’ needs for local transportation and housing in California differ based on disability along with other characteristics including income, race, gender, household size and composition, and age. Qualitative data collection efforts will be centered on two focus groups that will explore the types of challenges that people with different types of disabilities face with transportation and housing. Results from these efforts will inform the development of quantitative data collection efforts centered around a cross-sectional survey of California residents with or without disabilities, and from different backgrounds with respect to income, age, race, gender, and other characteristics.
The survey and accompanying data analyses aim to capture individuals’ choices and desires for transportation modes, travel frequencies, housing characteristics, and neighborhood characteristics. The research team will compare these patterns across respondents with respect to disability and other traits and explore further correlations among these choices and desires.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

There are several research questions that the researchers hope to answer with this project, listed below.

1. How do respondents’ travel mode choices differ based on the type of disability?
2. Do people with disabilities actually travel less often compared to people without disabilities?
3. How many people with disabilities travel infrequently because of transportation problems associated with their disabilities?
4. How do respondents’ neighborhood type (urban, rural, et cetera) choices differ based on the type of disability?
5. How do respondents’ desired travel modes differ based on the type of disability?
6. Do people with disabilities desire to travel as frequently as people without disabilities?
7. How do respondents’ desired neighborhood types differ based on the type of disability?
8. Do people with specific types of disabilities experience a bigger gap between desired and actual travel frequencies compared to people without disabilities?
9. How do choices and desires for transportation and housing differ for people with disabilities who do versus do not regularly depend on live-in caregivers?

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

Relevant products of this task order will include an important source of data that could be also used in future additional data analyses. Final reports with the results from the focus groups and analysis of survey data be distributed as appropriate to regional and state-level agencies as well as advocacy organizations. The researchers anticipate these materials will help to empower people with disabilities as well as people from other marginalized backgrounds to improve transportation and housing options available to them and will assist policymakers in this regard. This will likely be especially important in the context of California, where suburbanization of poverty in large coastal metropolitan areas, aging of the population as a whole, and high levels of dependence on private automobility (including driving oneself as well as depending on family or friends for rides) may together contribute to greater rates of social exclusion among people with disabilities. Additionally, the recruitment of people from diverse racial and geographic backgrounds, including the Central Valley where people are more likely to have racially marginalized backgrounds and experience environmentally induced disabilities, will be critical to understanding the diversity of needs with respect to race, geography, and disability type.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

This past quarter, we focused on improving the survey instrument based on feedback from testers from our focus group session as well as testers internal to UC Davis. This reworking of the survey instrument required careful planning, additional pre-testing, and reconstruction of digital survey logic.

We also met multiple times with our co-PI Giovanni Circella and staff from our survey hosting and data partner Qualtrics as we moved the survey instrument and the contract for Qualtrics’ services closer to final.

We remotely attended a Caltrans listening session on March 24 inviting residents of Kern County, especially those from marginalized communities, to share their experiences regarding transportation, engagement by Caltrans & other related statewide agencies, and health in their neighborhoods. We participated strictly as
observers, taking notes about people’s responses (without any personally identifying information) without interacting with anyone else. Our observations help us to better contextualize this project and gain more understanding of these challenges directly from the people affected.

Plan For Next Quarter:

The collision that injured the PI Dr. Venkataram in December has caused a delay in the public dissemination of the survey from the originally-projected date in early February. We have also faced unexpected significant delays in obtaining a final contract and pricing for the work performed by our data-collection partner Qualtrics. Due to the unforeseen circumstances outlined above, the bulk of analysis of data collected from the survey will be moved from this quarter to next quarter, with the start date for the analytical work moving from early April to June. Thus, our plans for the majority of this quarter are finalize the survey instrument and contract with Qualtrics and then disseminate the survey in large part with the assistance of Qualtrics as well as disability advocacy organization (DAO) partners. 

During the approximately two-month period that the survey collects responses, we will continue to develop the literature review for this project report as well as the analytical methods to be used for data from this survey. In June, we will close the survey and begin the process of cleaning and analyzing the resulting data.

Also, Caltrans will host more remote listening sessions across California to better understand transportation challenges in marginalized communities. We will continue to observe those sessions to better contextualize this project and gain more understanding of these challenges directly from the people affected.