

Research Notes

Modal

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Project Title: Disability, mode perceptions, and travel behavior: An intersectional study

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Disability, mode perceptions, and travel behavior: An intersectional study

People with disabilities continue to face major barriers when navigating the transportation system, even decades after the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) was passed. While many studies document these barriers, far less is known about how they actually shape the travel choices people make, or how disability combined with other disadvantages—such as race or income—may intensify these challenges.

This project will address these gaps by surveying Californians with disabilities to understand how they perceive the built environment, what challenges they face using different travel modes, and how these experiences influence their mode choices. The research will analyze these relationships using statistical methods and will work closely with disability-serving organizations to ensure the findings reflect real-world concerns. The results will provide policymakers with clearer evidence about how barriers influence travel behavior and how microtransit and other services can better support travelers with disabilities in California.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

More than thirty years after the ADA was passed, people with disabilities still face major barriers to getting around. Although they make up about one-quarter of the U.S. population, they take fewer trips and often rely on others because sidewalks, transit services, for-hire vehicles, and paratransit options don't fully meet their needs. While many studies have documented these mobility challenges, very little research has examined how these barriers actually shape the transportation choices people with disabilities make. Understanding this connection is essential for developing equitable transportation solutions.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

This project will design and conduct a web-based survey that oversamples California residents with disabilities to understand how disability affects their travel choices. The survey will capture information about people's perceptions of the built environment, the challenges they face using different travel

modes, and how overlapping disadvantages—such as race or income—shape their decisions. To analyze the data, the research team will use techniques such as descriptive statistics, comparison tests, and multinomial logistic regression. Throughout the project, the team will work with disability-serving organizations to ensure the survey reflects real concerns and that the findings support broader goals for universal access. While past research has mostly focused on documenting barriers, this study seeks to connect those barriers directly to the transportation choices people with disabilities make.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The goal of this research is to produce a policy-focused report that explains how people with disabilities perceive challenges in the built environment and different transportation modes, and how these perceptions shape the travel choices they make. To do this, the research team will conduct a web-based survey of California residents with disabilities, gathering information about the type of disability they have, their usual travel modes, the barriers they experience, their demographic characteristics, and where they live. The study will use descriptive statistics to identify broad patterns in perceptions and travel behavior, and it will model how disability, perceptions, and other factors are linked to mode choice. It will also examine how disability interacts with factors such as race and income to understand how overlapping disadvantages influence travel outcomes.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

This study will provide valuable evidence to help transportation agencies and policymakers better understand how disability intersects with other demographic and socioeconomic factors to influence mobility challenges and travel behavior. By addressing gaps in knowledge about the barriers people with disabilities experience, the research will support more equitable transportation planning and

the development of interventions that reflect real-world travel needs.

The findings will provide practical insights into how transportation services, including microtransit, can better serve Californians with disabilities. This information can help policymakers and transportation practitioners identify opportunities to improve accessibility, expand mobility options, and design services that more effectively meet the diverse needs of travelers with disabilities throughout California.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

The research team has developed and refined the web-based questionnaire through an iterative review process, incorporating feedback from project stakeholders. Recruitment strategies and survey administration details have also been finalized in coordination with the external survey firm. In parallel, the research team has begun the literature review to inform the survey design and establish the research context for examining disability, transportation mode perceptions, and travel behavior.

IMAGES



Image 1: Ride share ADA accessible vehicle Photo Credit: Matt Draper