

A Transportation Guide for Persons who are Blind or Have Low Vision

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A Transportation Guide for Persons who are Blind or Have Low Vision

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Congratulations! If you are reading this, you have taken a huge step in being proactive and taking responsibility for planning for your transportation needs. Transportation has historically been one of the most challenging obstacles persons who are blind or have low vision experience when beginning or returning to work. When you begin a new job, vocational rehabilitation or another agency may provide transportation assistance, but this support is typically limited; it is ultimately your responsibility to make travel arrangements and your decision about the best way to get to and from work. Expending the time and effort to learn the possible options is essential to finding the ride that best suits your needs.

Orientation and Mobility Training

The first step in developing your plan to get to and from work is to have good orientation and mobility (O&M) skills. A certified O&M specialist can help you learn to orient yourself to your environment and travel in a safe and efficient manner. O&M instruction will enable you to confidently and safely navigate a new environment and develop essential travel skills. Your white cane plays a crucial role in ensuring that you are safe and it alerts others that you may not see them.

If you have not received O&M training and would like to, or if you received O&M training and are not confident about your travel skills, contact your state vocational rehabilitation counselor or local blind rehabilitation agency (see www.afb.org/directory) to discuss your concerns. Once these skills have been obtained, thinking about the various transportation options may not be so overwhelming.

Bioptic Driving

A potential option for individuals with mild to moderate central vision loss is driving with a bioptic lens system. Bioptics are telescopes mounted to the top portion of glasses that improve distance vision for drivers. A low vision specialist can determine whether you may be a candidate for bioptic driving based on a comprehensive low vision examination. Bioptic driving is not available in all states and requires extensive training with low vision devices and driver's education. More information about bioptic driving can be found at the Bioptic Driving Network at www.biopicdriving.org or Bioptic Driving USA at www.biopicdrivingusa.com.

Public Transportation

When available, public transportation is typically the most cost-effective method to get to and from work. It also offers independence, as users do not need to rely on others for rides and it does not need to be scheduled in advance. Public transportation may also be called fixed-route service and it includes trains, subways, or buses that travel established paths at specified times.

Fares for public transportation vary, and some systems offer discounted rates for certain groups, such as older adults or people with disabilities. Check with your local transportation provider to determine if public transportation is offered in your area and to collect information about routes, schedules, and costs.

For help finding local public transportation providers, contact the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center by calling 1-866-983-3222, by emailing contact@nadtc.org, or by visiting www.nadtc.org. You can also visit the American Public Transportation Association's website at www.apta.com. Many large cities operate automated public transit information lines and offer the option of speaking to an operator. Try dialing 5-1-1 to see if your community has such a system.

If public transportation is not available in your area, consider alerting your elected officials that there is a need for it. Check back periodically to see if the situation changes.

If you currently use or are considering applying for a service animal, such as a dog guide, that animal may ride with you on public transportation. You cannot be required to sit in a certain place if you have a service animal. However, your service animal should not block the aisle or exits, and you are responsible for the animal's behavior. The animal is typically not allowed to sit on the seats.

Complementary Paratransit Service

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) has a provision for complementary paratransit services. These services may be known by different names, such as Dial-a-Ride or Access Service. Paratransit is a door-to-door or curb-to-curb service provided to people with disabilities who are unable to use fixed-route public transportation and who meet specific eligibility requirements. Complementary paratransit services are typically used when an accessible vehicle is not available on the fixed route or if the rider is unable to travel to the pickup point. Contact your local public transportation provider for information about paratransit programs (see contact information in the previous section about public transportation).

Complementary paratransit is not free of cost, although the fee for paratransit service will not exceed twice the fare of fixed-route service for the same trip. Please note that complementary paratransit means that the service is a complement to the fixed-route system (note the spelling difference – it is a complementary service, NOT a complimentary, or free, service). As such, it typically mirrors the routes and hours of operation of the fixed-route public transit system.

The ADA specifies that rides must be scheduled in advance. Some paratransit providers offer the option for subscription service if you routinely take the same trip on a regular schedule, such as going to and from work. Check with your local transportation provider for their policies. Vehicles should arrive within one hour of your requested time. You may travel with a friend, family member, or attendant if you make a reservation for that person when you arrange your ride. For more information on ADA paratransit requirements, go to dredf.org/ADAtg.

Other Specialized Transportation Services

Other specialized transportation services may be provided by county or city governments. Specialized transportation services are typically administered by programs serving people with disabilities or older adults. Human-service agencies or other non-profit agencies may also provide specialized transportation. These specialized services are often referred to as “paratransit” services, but they should not be confused with the ADA-mandated complementary paratransit service discussed above.

It may be necessary to contact several agencies to determine your options as many communities operate multiple transportation systems independently, and not all communities have the same options. When contacting agencies, explain what type of transportation you need. If the agency you contact cannot assist you, ask about a referral to other potential sources for transportation. Places to contact to determine what is available and who is eligible to use the service include:

- City or county government information or disability service offices, such as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, may have transportation resource guides or put you in contact with an O&M instructor.
- The Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for urban areas can provide transportation choices that are available in those areas, as well as current and upcoming projects.
- The Regional Council of Governments (COG) for rural areas provides a similar service as MPOs, but the focus is on several towns within a state.
- Centers for Independent Living work with public transit to help individuals develop independent living skills, and therefore, may have information on transit routes. To find Centers for Independent Living in your state visit www.virtualcil.net/cils.
- The American Public Transportation Association, available at www.publictransportation.org, is the best resource for locating public transportation and ADA complementary paratransit services.
- The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center is a good place to ask questions about accessible transportation and get referrals for transportation services in your community. Reach them by calling 1-866-983-3222, emailing contact@nadtc.org, or visiting www.nadtc.org.

Taxicab Services

Cabs can be used daily, but if you plan to use a cab on a regular basis, contact the company and try to negotiate a fixed cost for your schedule. If you negotiate a fixed rate, remember that the agreement is with the company and not the driver. You may have different drivers and it is important to make sure the driver is aware of your agreement and to also tip the driver. According to *CNN Money*, a 15% tip is usually adequate. The tip should be higher if the driver provides additional assistance, such as walking you to the door, helping with baggage, or making additional stops. You may be able to include the tip in your contract, saving time and the need to carry cash, but remember to thank the driver and reward his or her efforts.

In some cases, cabs are privately operated and your agreement is with the owner/operator. This means that some drivers have the flexibility to negotiate a fixed rate. If you work with the driver directly, the agreement is between the two of you. Your agreement should give you the flexibility to modify or discontinue the agreement if the driver is not dependable or other problems arise. It is important to include in your contract what to do when the ride is not needed, such as for vacation or sick days.

Although most taxicab drivers use a GPS, it is not always reliable. When you schedule a trip, provide an exact address and instructions of where you need to be picked up or dropped off. State whether you need additional accommodations, such as assistance getting to the entrance. While it is not always necessary to provide directions, it is helpful to do so, particularly if the driver is unfamiliar with the area. You can get directions from someone at your worksite or you can get driving directions from online sources like MapQuest (www.mapquest.com) or Google Maps (maps.google.com).

Get information about different cab companies to determine which has the best fees and compare reliability and safety records. Consider sharing cab expenses with a coworker who has a similar schedule to reduce costs.

Service animals are, by law, allowed to ride in cabs. Drivers may ask whether your animal is a pet or a service animal and may ask what tasks the animal performs, but drivers are not allowed to demand that you produce documentation or ask questions about your disability. As when using public transportation, you are responsible for your animal's behavior. The driver may refuse to allow the animal on the seat, so it may be wise to bring along a towel or blanket as a courtesy.

Carpooling or Ride-sharing

Carpooling or ride-sharing can be dependable and cost-effective methods of getting to and from work. With fuel costs constantly changing, persons who were previously unwilling to participate in a carpool may now find themselves agreeing to share a ride. If other carpool participants take turns driving, perhaps you could participate for a fee. Discuss expectations (such as what time you need to be ready and if eating or drinking in the car is allowed) and compensation in advance.

When carpooling, be on time and communicate with the driver. Communication is especially important if you will not ride in the carpool a particular day. If you have errands or appointments before or after work, make other arrangements for transportation that day. If several drivers participate in the carpool, it is likely that one of them will drive if the designated driver is not available. Determine in advance the plan for potential emergencies or schedule changes. If there is only one designated driver, make a plan with someone who could drive you to work if the designated driver is not available.

Ask your driver to check with their automobile insurance carrier to determine the potential need for policy modifications if you ride with them on a regular basis, regardless of whether you provide financial compensation. Contacting the insurance carrier is advisable even if compensation is limited to reimbursement for expenses. These issues vary by state law.

Transportation costs vary depending on the type of transportation and current prices for fuel, insurance, and taxes. Some drivers must pay tolls and parking fees as well and it may be appropriate for a rider to help pay for these additional expenses in addition to operational costs. Keep these factors in mind when considering how much transportation may cost.

Based on 2016 operating and ownership costs, AAA estimates that driving costs an average of 42.36 cents to 66.26 cents per mile, depending on the size of the vehicle and estimating 15,000 total miles per year (exchange.aaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/17-0013_Your-Driving-Costs-Brochure-2017-FNL-CX-1.pdf). For example, a midsize sedan driven 15,000 miles per year would cost \$8,171 per year. That equates to \$22.38 per day.

Gas prices continue to fluctuate and are expected to rise. Visit gasprices.aaa.com or www.gaspricewatch.com for current information about gas prices in your area. Larger or older cars typically get lower gas mileage than newer or smaller cars. A car may get as few as 12 miles per gallon or over 40 miles per gallon if the car is very efficient.

Government employees are typically reimbursed 54.5 cents per mile when they use personal cars for business travel. For the most recent reimbursement rate, visit the U.S. General Service Administration's website at www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/transportation-airfare-rates-pov-rates-etc/privately-owned-vehicle-pov-mileage-reimbursement-rates. Government employees usually receive salaries, so they are already paid for their driving time; the mileage reimbursement is for fuel and vehicle use. Private employers may reimburse their employees at a different rate.

Finding carpools

Most people find carpools through informal means, such as talking with friends and colleagues. Put the word out to your social and employment network that you are looking for a carpool. Some employers connect employees for carpools, so check with your employer's human resources department to determine if that assistance is available.

Find out what businesses are close to your destination and if people there drive to and from work at similar hours. If so, make contacts there to see if you could carpool with someone from that business. If you are traveling near a large employer, such as a hospital, you can start with personal contacts, or contact the human resources department at that employer and request assistance advertising for a carpool.

You may also check to see if any of your neighbors drive to work on a similar schedule and on a route that would put you close to your destination. If a person lives near you and is driving to a nearby area, they may be willing to drive you to and from work for a fee. Be sure to offer fair compensation and use the same general rules as when carpooling with coworkers.

Some public transportation providers offer carpool assistance. There are also internet resources or smartphone apps you may use to locate a carpool, such as www.sharetheride.com.

Ride-Hailing Services

Use of ride-hailing services, or transportation services frequently referred to by their commercial names like Uber or Lyft, have expanded transportation options in many areas of the country. Although ride-hailing can technically include the use of cabs, it more frequently refers to services where a rider contacts a centralized location via a phone or a smartphone app to request a driver. Instead of hailing a ride on the street, as with a cab, you hail a ride by using a phone, or more frequently, an app. Using a smartphone app requires you to set up an account that includes submission of a payment source and your photo. When you hail a ride, the cost of the ride (including tip) is billed to your account. You submit your pick-up point, destination, and time of requested service. The company sends you the driver's information (name, photo, license number, etc.), and the driver picks you up and drives you to your location.

Ride-hailing services are generally regarded as safe, but you should always use caution when riding with a stranger. Before entering a ride-hailing vehicle, confirm the identity of the driver. Use questions that require more than yes or no answers. For example, in addition to asking the driver's name, ask the license plate number, which you can check against the information sent to you from the company. Consider sharing your trip details with a friend or family member (the app includes a "share status" feature) so your trip can be tracked. Do not share your personal information with your driver. If using ride-hail for work, inform your colleagues of the service you are using. Provide them with contact information so that, if needed, your whereabouts can be confirmed.

When using a ride-hailing service, the driver typically uses a personal vehicle to transport you. Drivers must complete a background check and have their vehicles inspected before being used for these services. If you lose or forget something in the vehicle, contact the company, not the driver. Similarly, if you have complaints about the service, contact the company.

Ride-hailing provides you individualized customer service. Prices are typically lower than standard taxicabs. Uber and Lyft do not operate in all places; check company websites to see if they or similar companies operate in your area.

Paid Drivers

You may consider hiring someone to drive you to and from work. This option involves an hourly or fixed fee that is paid in addition to mileage expenses (when the driver provides the car). You could also provide and maintain your own car and hire someone to drive it for you. In this case, you would pay an hourly fee for the driver's time. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the current minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. You can check the Department's website for changes at www.dol.gov/whd/minimumwage.htm.

Options for finding a hired driver include: asking family and friends for recommendations, checking postings at community centers or other public places such as grocery stores, posting a request or advertising for a driver yourself, checking ads in local newspapers or internet sites, and asking at your place of worship or other civic organizations to which you may belong. You may also consider using social-networking sites to locate a driver. Before using a hired driver, ask for and contact references with a prepared list of questions about the driver's driving habits, safety, and any other concerns. You may use the same questions to interview the driver. Remember to negotiate compensation in advance.

When hiring a driver, consider having one person drive you to work and a different person drive you home. A morning schedule might fit into the routine of some people, while an afternoon schedule works better for others. This arrangement can also be beneficial by providing backup options if one driver becomes unavailable.

You may choose to have a trial period of a few days or weeks while you decide if a driver is right for you. Paid drivers should notify their insurance companies that they are using their vehicles to drive someone for a fee.

Relatives or Friends as Drivers

Asking family or friends to drive you to and from work each day can become complicated and is often not the most reliable option. Consider asking family and friends to drive only occasionally, such as in an emergency or for trips outside of work. In such cases, offer a fee for either their service or to cover the cost of fuel. It is important to reciprocate favors; doing something nice for the people who assist you with driving goes a long way toward assuring that they will be willing to do so again in the future.

If you choose to hire a friend or relative as a driver, follow the same procedures you would use for hiring any other driver. Have clearly defined expectations for both the service to be provided and the compensation for that service. It is also helpful to discuss in advance the steps that will be taken if the driver chooses to end the agreement or if you determine that the service is not working as needed. Settling such things in advance will protect your personal relationship from potential hard feelings.

Volunteer Drivers

If a driver is NOT paid to drive you, that driver is regarded as a volunteer driver. Liability laws pertaining to volunteer drivers vary by state. For more information about liability laws in your state, visit the National Conference of State Legislatures website at www.ncsl.org/print/transportation/vol_driverliabl06.pdf (note that this information is from 2006 and may have changed). Check with the driver's automobile insurance agent for updated information. Volunteer drivers are typically volunteering their time only and may still accept reimbursement for associated expenses, such as fuel costs and fees for tolls or parking.

Some human-service agencies or nonprofits operate volunteer-driver programs that can connect you with a volunteer driver for the trips you need. Although some programs pay mileage-reimbursement fees to the drivers, in most cases, the rider is responsible for paying this fee. While the program handles the recruitment of volunteer drivers, you have the right to interview the driver and decide if you are comfortable using their service. To find these programs, contact a local agency, such as the Council on Aging, the ARC, or a center for independent living, and ask for information and referrals. You may need to contact several agencies before you find one that fits your needs.

If you use a service animal, ask the driver if he or she is comfortable allowing the animal in the vehicle. The driver could be allergic to animals or may prefer not to allow animals in the vehicle. Discuss potential problems your animal might cause in advance, such as upholstery damage or bathroom accidents. Confirm with potential drivers that you will be responsible for repairs or clean up.

Bicycles

Riding a bicycle to work is feasible for some people. If you ride a bike other places and are confident doing that, explore the possibility of using it to get to and from work. Make sure you know the route, follow traffic signals, and are aware of safety issues. Consider changing your schedule or route to avoid high-traffic times or routes, if bike paths are not available. Be aware of the weather, stay current on helmet laws or other bicycle regulations, and keep your ID and cell phone on you in case of an emergency.

Walking

Some people live a short distance from their jobs and can walk to work. If you live close to your job, or are willing to relocate, walking may be an option for you. Besides being good exercise, walking saves transportation expenses and provides independence. If you are comfortable walking to your job, make sure you know the route well and follow important safety tips. For example, wear brightly colored clothing at night, use sidewalks when possible, be aware of traffic or areas of potential danger, and plan in advance for weather issues.

Backup Plans

Emergency backup plans for transportation are important. Transportation arrangements can go wrong for many reasons. Planning for possible transportation problems can prevent you from being stranded. Try to identify one or more people who can take you to and from work on a temporary basis while you make other permanent arrangements. Always carry the phone number of someone who can give you a ride on short notice if your usual ride is not on time.

Despite your best efforts, you may have occasions where you cannot find a ride to work. When this occurs, contact your employer and explain your situation. Try to have an estimate of when you will have your transportation issue resolved. Evaluate your workplace to determine if your employer would be receptive to discussing transportation options with you. Some employers may be willing to help you network with coworkers to get transportation, while others may regard that discussion as an indication that you are not independent.

Transportation Tips

Once you know what is available, weigh each option against the following factors:

- Cost
- Reliability
- Independence of travel
- Safety
- Convenience

Listed below are tips specific to the type of transportation you select. Many of the tips relate to appropriate interactions with other passengers or drivers.

For Public Transportation

- Have correct change. Drivers do not make change and are prohibited from handling fares unless it is needed as a reasonable accommodation under the ADA.
- Be sensitive to issues of body space. In crowded situations, people tend to stand or sit closer to each other. When it is less crowded, people tend to spread out and allow each other more personal space.
- Hold personal items or stow them under your seat. These items should not block the aisle or prevent others from sitting next to you.
- Use headphones when listening to music or audiobooks. While most public transportation allows the use of cell phones, etiquette requires that you keep your voice low and refrain from using profanity or discussing issues that may be offensive. For safety, do not give out personal information, such as credit card numbers or your address.

- Respect the privacy of others. Greeting fellow passengers is polite but not necessary. Avoid engaging in long conversations with people you do not know, both for your own safety and to respect the privacy of others. Some people riding the bus to and from work use that time to read or nap and would prefer not to be engaged. You may hear others engaged in long talks but that is usually because those people are already friends.
- For safety reasons, be cautious about napping on public transportation. If you do choose to nap, be alert that snoring or leaning on other passengers is viewed as inappropriate.
- If you are riding with a friend, be mindful of your conversation. Remember that others can hear you. Do not share information that might put you at risk or make others uncomfortable.
- Avoid personal grooming while using public transportation. This includes combing your hair, cleaning your nails, or putting on makeup.
- If you are standing up due to crowding, try to move to the side so others can enter or exit.
- Eating and drinking are often prohibited on public transit. Check with your local provider to learn the policy. When eating and drinking are prohibited, chewing gum or eating small pieces of candy are usually allowed. If you need a reasonable modification to a no-eating-or-drinking policy because of disability (e.g., you need access to appropriate food or drink because of diabetes), this should be arranged with the transit provider in advance.
- Pick up after yourself. Do not leave wrappers, napkins, or other items behind on public transportation.
- Avoid strongly scented perfumes, body lotions, or cologne, as you will be in close contact with others who may not enjoy the scent or may be sensitive to it.

For Taxicabs

- If you state a preferred route, the driver is supposed to take it. The driver may recommend another route but it is up to you which route you prefer. If the route you request takes longer than you anticipated, do not blame the driver.
- When you call for a cab, tell the dispatcher your address and where you are going. Ask how long it should take you to get to your destination and about how much it will cost. If you need assistance at pick up or drop off, be sure and let the dispatcher know.
- Tell the driver if you need assistance at drop off well before arriving at your destination.
- If you use the same cab company regularly, you can ask for a particular driver or ask that you not get a particular driver.
- You may ask the driver to turn down the radio, but the driver usually decides on which radio station to play.

- Ask the driver for his or her name and cab number in case you have a problem. If you want to report problems to the cab company later, you will need this information, along with the date, your route, and your destination.
- Always ask for a receipt. This information is helpful if you forget something in the cab.
- Fasten your seatbelt. In many states this is the law and the driver can get a fine if you are not buckled up.
- Speak clearly so the driver can hear you.
- Do not smoke.
- If you have a beverage, be sure it is in a spill-proof cup. Keep snacks small.
- Clean up your mess.
- Do not forget to tip. For occasional trips, 15% is sufficient. For regular trips, at least one or two dollars is appropriate. If you have bags or put items in the trunk, you will need to tip more. If you negotiate a weekly or hourly rate, you still need to tip the driver.
- Have cash available for payment. Credit or debit cards may or may not be accepted, and checks are usually not accepted.

For Hired Drivers

- Be clear about what time you need to be picked up and dropped off. Remember that you have a business relationship and each person should fulfill their commitments.
- Confirm compensation before you make any trip.
- Your driver should respect your privacy, but be aware that very personal conversations are not appropriate.

For Carpools

- Carpool members typically do not want to do errands on the way to or from work. Avoid scheduling these as part of your carpool route.
- Communicate with your peers in the carpool. If you are running late, let them know.
- Try as hard as you can to always be on time. Being late is a big problem for everyone in the carpool.
- Communicate ahead of time about reimbursement, and do not make the driver ask you for money. Establish when it should be paid, like the beginning or end of each week, and offer it at the correct time.
- Give notice if you will not be in the carpool a particular day.
- Stick to whatever rules the carpool has agreed on about smoking, eating, and drinking.

- Steer away from potentially controversial topics. For example, do not bring up extremely personal issues, religion, or politics unless you already know others in the carpool very well. Even when you do know them well, be cautious about these topics.
- Get a sense of whether others in the carpool prefer to chat or have a quiet ride and try to accommodate group preferences. Be mindful that conversation may distract a driver.
- In some carpools, passengers may nap. If you snore, this is not a good idea. If you do go to sleep, do not lean on the other passengers.
- Do not have lengthy personal or business phone conversations in the car.
- If you use audio devices, use headphones.
- Steer away from strongly scented perfumes, body lotions, or cologne, as you will be in close contact with others who may not enjoy the scent or may be sensitive to it.
- Be respectful of the car. Do not damage the interior (upholstery) or exterior (such as by slamming doors). Put your belongings in the trunk if the car is crowded or you are traveling with equipment.
- Be flexible. Sometimes unexpected things will happen.
- Be aware that the tallest person or someone who gets carsick may prefer the front seat.
- Respect the driver's decision about routes. This is not a cab where you have control. You can discuss preferred routes, but the driver has the final decision.
- Be polite to everyone in the car. Remember that everyone has bad days. Be tolerant of each other.
- Wear your seatbelt. Policies about seatbelt use vary by state law and your driver may be held responsible if you do not wear yours.

For Ride-Hailing Services

- The driver will pick you up at a designated point; be sure you are where you are supposed to be when the driver arrives.
- Ask the driver's name and license number to confirm that you are entering the correct vehicle. Never get in a vehicle until you are sure it is the correct one.
- Remember that you are usually riding in the driver's personal vehicle. Be respectful of their vehicle.
- If you did not tip the driver using the smartphone app, do so when you exit the vehicle.

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