

First Mile / Last Mile

First mile/last mile describes the beginning and end of an individual's trip made primarily by public transportation. However, starting and arriving at a final destination could prove very challenging for the blind and visually impaired. Availability of locating the next bus stop, uneven terrain, lack of sidewalks, inadequate information about options and lack of availability of alternate transportation to reach a final destination after leaving the transit system, all of which could prove to be unnerving for any traveler but maybe more so for one with a visual impairment.

With a focus on social equity, the Toronto Transit Commission is working on creating seamless transit by connecting bus routes to their subway system. Toronto's Go Rail Station Access Plan is focusing on finding ways to aid riders get to Go services without depending on the need to drive their own vehicles. Micro-transit, carpooling, improvements to walking and cycling routes including affordable and barrier-free access are being evaluated as ways to improve transit accessibility.

First/last mile service models have experimented with ride share services and, while these are mostly accessible, they do require a mobile phone and data plan to be utilized. The affordability of mobile phones and data plans can become a barrier to this mode of transportation for passengers with sight loss who are unable to afford these devices.

Paratransit is available in cities and towns with fixed bus routes for those with disabilities. It is available to those who are not able to use the fixed bus routes. Paratransit allows an individual to schedule rides. They will pick you up and drop you off at certain locations. Access-A-Bus is a conventional transit system and is available to those individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities. The bus must be reserved in advance. They provide transportation to medical and personal appointments as well as enables one to participate in social and recreational activities.

Public transportation is an important part of everyday life for many people. It connects them to their community and gives them a chance to become independent while traveling to school, work, shopping and anywhere they choose to go. Since people who are blind or visually impaired cannot drive it is imperative that safe, efficient and affordable transportation options be available.

Recommendations:

- First/last mile solutions such as shuttles, ride share or non-conventional buses must accommodate a diverse ridership.
- Canadian cities have begun pilot projects using autonomous shuttles and these experiments must include riders with sight loss in determining the effectiveness or viability of the service.

- Innovative first/last mile transportation must accommodate people using guide or service dogs so that the animal is able to safely lie at rest beneath or next to their handlers seat.
- Onboard information systems on first/last mile vehicles must be equipped with accessible systems as set out in <the section on accessible transit>.