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Travel Trends of People with Travel-Limiting Disabilities in Los Angeles County

Madeline Brozen • 2021

Issue

More than 30 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, significant gaps in ADA compliance persist. These gaps create additional access burdens for people with disabilities while traveling, especially when it comes to travel by foot and public transit. Some of these difficulties include physical barriers, such as uneven pavement and lack of curb cuts, and slow and costly public transit — oftentimes the main source of transportation for people with disabilities.

According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, approximately 50% of American adults with disabilities aged 18 to 64 have travel-limiting disabilities, with the prevalence of disability increasing with age. In Los Angeles County, one in five adults report having a disability meaning more than 800,000 people likely experience a travel-limiting disability.

By analyzing local results from the 2017 National Household Travel Survey California add-on, the research team learned more about transportation patterns and needs for people with disabilities. For this brief, the researchers limited their study to survey respondents

who indicated that their disabilities limit travel outside their homes. These findings are compared with the rest of Los Angeles County to understand how planners could create intersectional solutions for equitable transportation systems.

Key Findings

- » Nearly 17% of all trips that people with disabilities take are done by walking, which represents a larger share of trips than public transportation or paratransit services combined. People with disabilities take more trips by walking than Los Angeles County residents on average (14%) (**Figure 1**).
- » People with travel-limiting disabilities use a variety of mobility devices. The most common devices are canes (35%) and walkers (25%). Only 12% of the respondents use a manual or motorized wheelchair.
- » Even though trips by people with disabilities are shorter, they take longer to complete. The average trip is 6.5 miles long, compared to 8.3 miles countywide, and it lasts about 27.8 minutes versus 27 minutes. This increased duration is likely

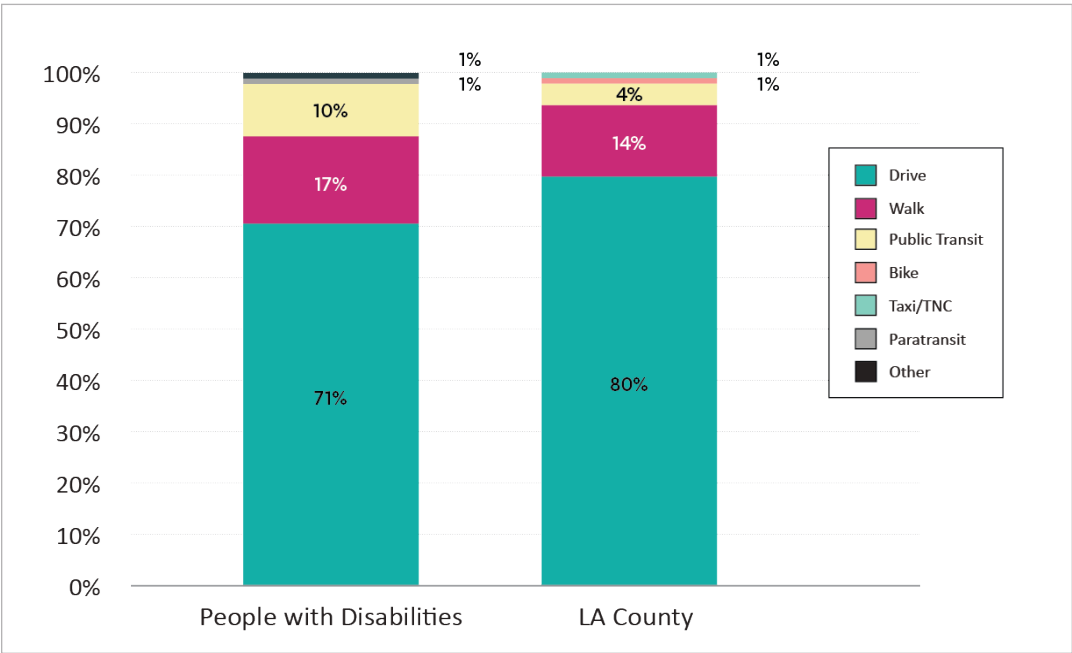


Figure 1.
Percent of trips by mode for
people with disabilities and
Los Angeles County

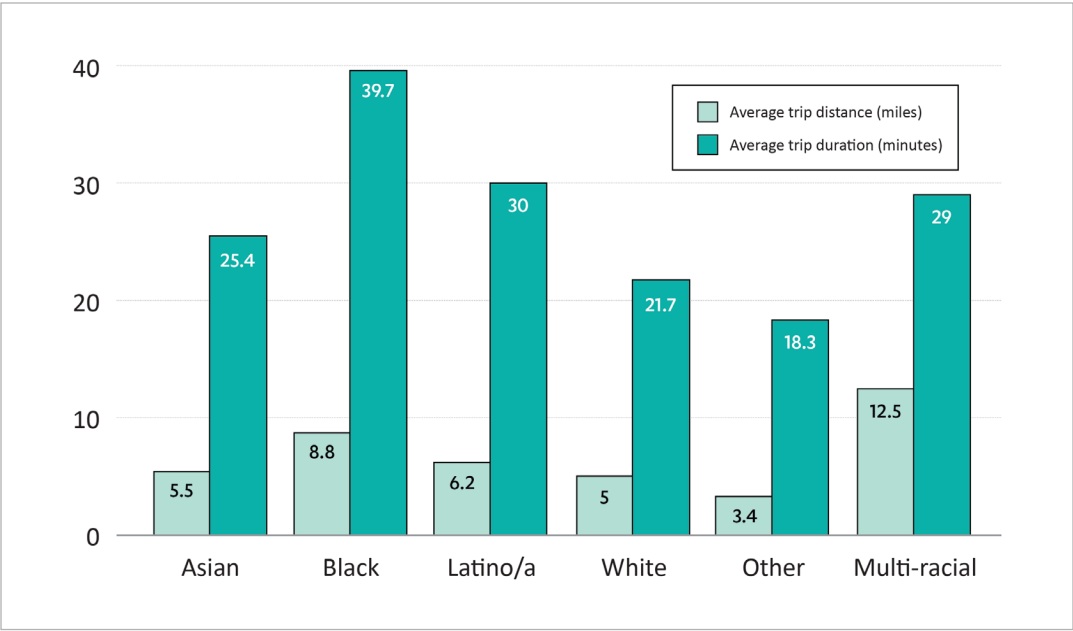


Figure 2.
Travel metrics by race/ethnicity, people with disabilities

- due to a combination of factors beyond disabilities, including greater reliance on slower modes of travel, like walking and public transit.
- » The use of public transportation is especially high for health care-related trips (36%) for people with disabilities.
 - » There are considerable racial and ethnic differences among people with disabilities (**Figure 2**). Black people with disabilities take longer trips (nearly 9 miles on average) than most other individuals. The time spent on the trip also varies considerably — 22 minutes for white individuals versus 40 minutes for Black people with disabilities.
 - » When asked how their condition impacts their travel, an overwhelming majority said it reduces their day-to-day travel (78%). About 16% of respondents said they used public transit less, and 13% responded that they used special transit services like paratransit.
 - » Pedestrians using wheelchairs had a one-third higher risk of being killed in traffic collisions as found using national data from the fatality analysis reporting system between 2006–2012. However, this research could not be replicated in Los Angeles County because traffic collision data forms in California do not collect information on whether the injured or killed pedestrian was using a wheelchair at the time of the collision.

Recommendations

- » Local departments of transportation and regional transit agencies should conduct sidewalk and intersection audits around bus and rail stops. This will ensure that people with disabilities have safe sidewalks and street crossings to access

- public transportation. Given the significant racial and ethnic differences, audits and improvements should be prioritized in communities of color, and in Black communities in particular.
- » Public transit agencies should consider implementing strategies to speed up bus service, such as all-door boarding and enforced bus-only lanes. These measures can shorten travel times for people with disabilities, especially as many use transit to access critical health care services.
 - » Standard approaches around collision data collection should be updated to include information relating to whether the victim was in a wheelchair or uses a mobility-assistance device. This will help understand the relationship between travel patterns and traffic violence for people with disabilities.

About the Author

Madeline Brozen is deputy director of the UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

More Information

This brief is based on the “Intersectional transportation trends in Los Angeles County” report by Madeline Brozen, Nataly Rios, Isabel Cardenas, Annaleigh Yahata Ekman, and Ben Bressette. The report was funded as part of the Pacific Southwest Region University Transportation Center research program and is available at <https://www.metrans.org/research/intersectional-transportation-trends-in-los-angeles-county>.