

August 2016

Travel Instruction

Travel instruction is the professional activity of teaching seniors, people with disabilities, or other travelers how to ride fixed-route public transit independently and safely.¹ This practice brief provides an introduction to the components of a travel instruction program, strategies and tools for implementation, and links to additional information sources.

Travel instruction consists of three distinct activities:

- *Transit orientation* explains transportation systems by sharing information about trip planning, schedules, maps, fare systems, mobility devices, and benefits of service. It may be conducted in a group setting or one-on-one.
- *Familiarization* teaches people who are experienced with traveling about a new route or mode of transportation. It may be conducted in a group or one-on-one.
- *Travel training* is an intensive, one-on-one process to help someone gain the knowledge and skills needed to make trips independently. Travel training is individualized to meet each student's unique needs. Travel training is the primary focus of this brief.

Travel instruction is not the same as Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training for people with visual impairments. O&M training can include travel instruction, but also covers a number of other skills. For O&M training in Massachusetts, contact the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind: www.mass.gov/mcb.

COMPONENTS, STRATEGIES, AND TOOLS

A travel instruction program covers information and skills a trainee needs in order to ride public transit independently. The curriculum will vary, depending on whether the instruction is in a group setting or individualized, and whether it is an orientation, familiarization, or travel training. Common components include the following:

- Practicing riding transit (further detail below)
- Paying the fare
- Signaling your stop
- Using accessibility features on the vehicle and at the stops
- What to do if you miss your stop or get lost

¹ For more detail on the definition of travel instruction, please visit travelinstruction.org/definition-of-travel-training.

- Learning safety skills for interacting with other passengers on the vehicle, at the station, and at stops

Depending on the trainee's needs and abilities, travel instruction may also include safe street crossing and trip planning.

Practicing Riding Transit: A Key Component of Travel Instruction

Orientation and familiarization sessions may include a ride on transit to convey a flavor of the experience. In an individualized travel training program (one-on-one), learning and practicing one or more trips on transit is a critical component. In travel training, the trainer and trainee will select one or more trips the trainee wants to learn, such as how to take the bus from the trainee's home to work. The trainer will accompany the trainee on this trip and help identify landmarks so that the trainee knows where to get off the bus. If the trip includes a transfer, the trainer will help the trainee learn where to catch the second bus and how to identify the correct bus to board.

As trainees begin to learn the trip, they will practice it with less supervision; first, the trainer is likely to move to a different part of the bus. Once the trainee is ready to try the trip independently, the trainer can drive behind the bus in a car to ensure that the trainee boards the bus and gets off at the correct location.

Strategies for One-on-One Travel Training

- **Intake:** The first step in an individualized travel training program is a detailed intake. This process identifies what the potential trainee needs and determines whether the trainee is a good fit for travel training. During intake, the travel trainer interviews the prospective trainee to find out where the trainee needs to go and assesses whether the trainee has the abilities needed to successfully complete the travel training program. For example, if the travel training program does not teach street crossing skills, the trainer would need to assess whether the prospective trainee could cross streets safely. If not, the trainer should refer the trainee to another program that can help with these skills and suggest the trainee return for travel training after gaining the necessary skills.
- **Route & Scout:** Travel trainers are advised to practice the trip before going out with trainees so that trainers become familiar with any complications, detours, uneven terrain, or other challenges that may arise during the training session.

Customized Tools

Travel training is an individualized activity. Customized tools can help trainees learn their routes more quickly and easily.

- **Landmarks:** Many travel trainers take photos of key landmarks and create a booklet or handout that trainees can follow along with and use to help identify when to get off

the bus. This approach particularly helps visual learners. One educator in Massachusetts created customized podcasts for his students to listen to as they ride, to give them verbal cues of landmarks.

- **Cellphones:** Phones can also be a helpful tool for trainees. Some trainees benefit from smartphone apps that use GPS technology to follow along the bus route. Trainees could also set an alarm clock to alert them that it is time to start paying attention to landmarks, as the bus will soon be approaching their stop.

IMPLEMENTING A TRAVEL INSTRUCTION PROGRAM

Travel instruction programs can take many different forms. Organizations looking to offer travel instruction should consider the following:

- **What type(s) of instruction will the program offer?** Some programs focus primarily on providing one-on-one instruction to help individuals become independent transit riders. Others focus on group orientations, to introduce large groups to the availability of transit. Programs can also offer both one-on-one and group sessions.
- **Who is the target population?** Programs may target individuals with disabilities, seniors, students in transition classrooms, or a mix. Some travel trainers also do more general outreach to recruit riders, such as on college campuses. Other programs reach out to immigrants, refugees, and additional community groups that could benefit from transit.
- **How should the program be structured?** Travel instruction programs can be housed in transit authorities, human service agencies, or schools.
 - Transit authorities can use in-house staff, contractors, or both to provide travel instruction. When travel trainers are on staff, they benefit from access to internal information, operations staff, and drivers. However, some transit authorities prefer to contract out to human service agencies for their expertise in social service skills that are critical to travel training. Whether in-house or contracted, travel trainers can be full-time or part-time. Full-time staff can devote their attention to travel training. However some transit authorities –especially those starting a new program– may prefer to task part-time staff with travel training. It can take a while for a new program to generate enough demand for employing a full-time travel trainer.
 - Some human service agencies that serve people with disabilities provide travel instruction to consumers who can use public transit to access jobs or other opportunities in the community. The extent to which these programs are formalized varies widely. Some provide travel instruction on an ad hoc basis,

while others establish and publicize formal programs. In some instances, human service agencies refer consumers to travel instruction programs at transit authorities. In other instances, transit authorities refer individuals to human service agencies.

- Special education teachers and transition specialists may also provide travel instruction, especially to students who have independent travel as a goal in their Individualized Education Program (IEP). Some teachers conduct field trips using public transit to give students a flavor of the experience. Other teachers provide in-depth, individualized instruction and teach skills that a student needs to become an independent user of transit. A best practice for schools is to partner with the transit authority serving their community.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Resources on travel instruction are available including toolkits on program cost, performance measures and more. In particular, check out *Resources and Support for Travel Instruction Programs in Massachusetts* to learn about peer networking opportunities, workshops from expert travel trainers, and funding opportunities. These documents are available at

www.massdot.state.ma.us/transit/MobilityManagementCenter/Resources/TravelInstruction.aspx.

USEFUL CONTACT INFORMATION

Please contact rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us for additional information about travel instruction in Massachusetts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Information in this brief was derived from workshops offered by Easter Seals Project ACTION and the Kennedy Center, as well as informal conversations with travel trainers in Massachusetts.

Reference: Rachel Fichtenbaum. (2016) *Travel Instruction*. Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Human Service Transportation Office, Quincy, MA