

Radically Inclusive Transit in Edmonton Report from Research





With the support of the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, since 2020 a team of people living with disabilities have worked collaboratively to engage in a review of human rights in Alberta as they relate to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Radical Inclusion members continue to engage in increasing the overall awareness of the challenges and experiences faced by people living with a disability, whether visible or invisible.

build a **MOVEMENT**

build a team that is connected and pushing forward a disability led movement for change

push back **ADVOCATE**

work together to demand accountability and movement forward on human rights

shifting **EDUCATE**

develop educational campaign and materials to facilitate improved awareness and understanding but push a new narrative around disability

Research on Transportation - background



Five focus groups were held between March - July 2022 facilitated by Radical Inclusion. 45 people had their voices heard during several group discussions over this time.

The project was done in collaboration with the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, Dr. Emily Grise and Dr. Joshua Evans of the University of Alberta.

Dr. Grise and Dr. Evans are currently undertaking a project entitled, “Understanding the evolving transport needs of seniors and persons with disabilities in Edmonton, Canada.” This project is also being done in collaboration with the City of Edmonton and Edmonton Transit Service with the goal to strengthen public transit for people living with disabilities (PWD).

Barriers to mobility can significantly hinder one's ability to live a dignified and meaningful life.

The series of conversations, from March - July, focused on:

- how people living with disabilities in Edmonton experience the public transit system
- how the system can be changed to better ensure mobility rights and the rights of those living with invisible disabilities and
- how human rights of people living with disability in Edmonton can be improved

Overarching Themes

Mobility is essential for everyone in life in one form or another. It is a key piece of being able to access basic rights such as food, shelter etc. and live independently with dignity. Six main areas of concern which came out of this research include:

- **current business model regarding transportation**
- **willingness to listen**
- **affordability**
- **accessibility for hard of hearing**
- **training and competencies of staff**
- **communications among staff and with passengers**

This summary illustrates the key issues discussed and key recommendations for improvement.



Overarching Recommendations

Business Model

- There must be a re-evaluation of the business model for disability transportation - it should not be a charity model but rather move to a rights based model.
- Citizen based audit and evaluation of the budget for transportation and accessibility and how these funds are being used.

Listening

- ETS commitment to learning about ableism and how it plays out in their every day work and how it is a journey, not a checkmark.
- Pay individuals on the Disability Advisory Group (DAG) for a one way cab ride to the meetings to get them there on time and to use time effectively.
- DAG have meetings at an appropriate time such as 5 pm or something when people are not working. If ETS wants diversity in DAG, they need to think of timing of meetings.
- Audit and review of the complaints mechanisms within ETS, particularly DATS, needs to be done.

Hard of Hearing

- Add hearing induction loops on all ETS buses, LRT, Dats and all station platforms.

Bussing

Driver Training

Key Issues

- Independent bus use is challenging
ie. steep ramps, difficulty securing safety ties and measures
- Lack of sensitivity / empathy towards the disabled populations
ie. feeling like we are "a spectacle", needing some assistance with seats
- Disregard for rules put in place to accommodate people with disabilities
ie. ignoring mobility tags for further accessibility, drivers missing stops if tag is noticed before

Key Recommendations

- drivers and respectfulness - Raising awareness among staff and training drivers is really important.
- *Empathy courses*



Bussing

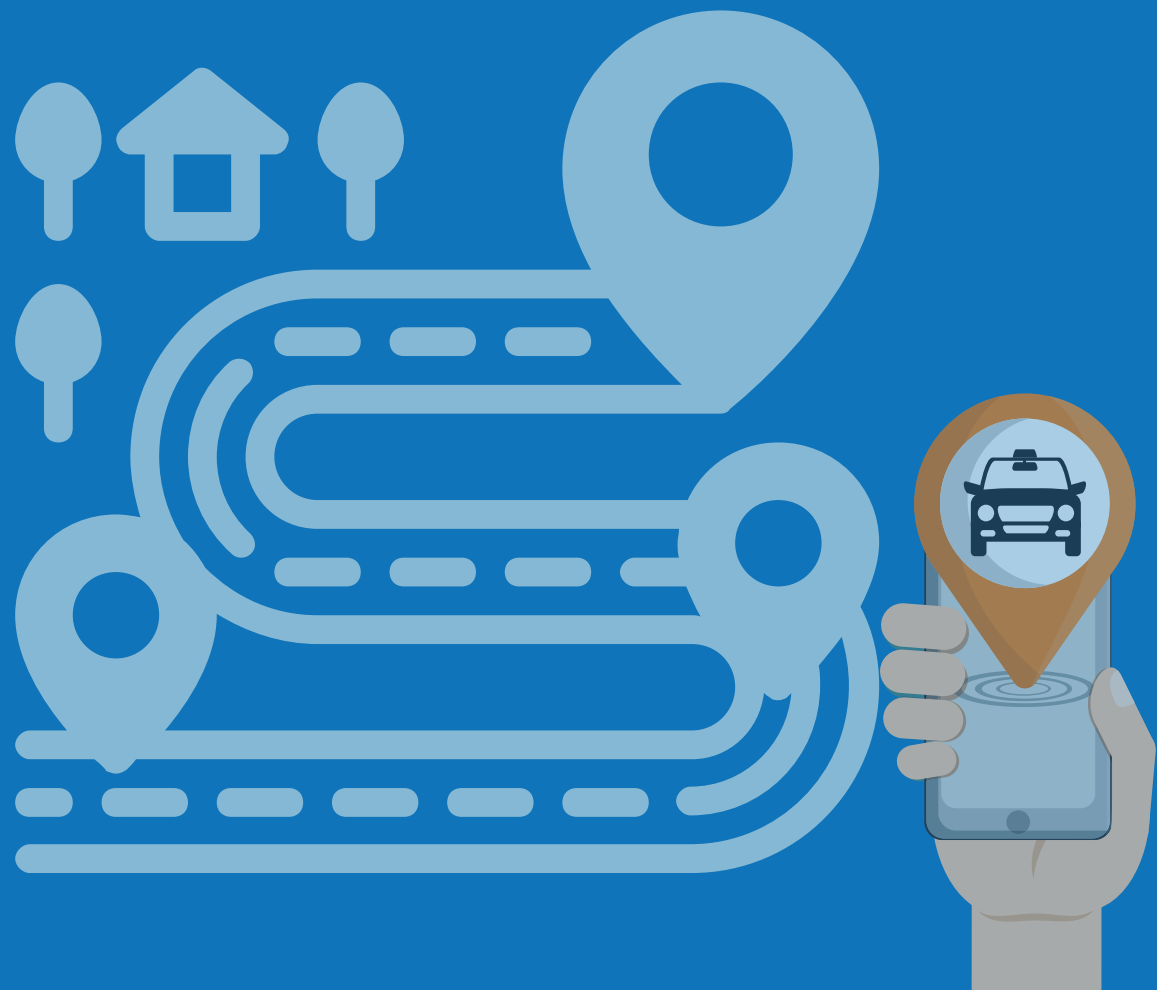
Blind/Low-Vision People

Key Issues

- It is hard to tell from any of the apps which corner of the street the bus will be on.
- Difficulty with seeing the bus numbers.

Key Recommendations

- Depending if you are on a street or avenue so that if the stop is on 50 street it would say 50 street first. If on 90 avenue, then say 90 ave first so you would know what side of street was on.
- Different coloured busses for different routes.



Bussing

Being a Winter City

Key Issues

- Some of the curbs are not beneficial to access the buses.
- Need more bus shelters especially heated bus shelters.
- The snow makes it hard for people to get on the bus
- Walking is difficult because of the damaged sidewalks.
- Seniors and people with disabilities have to walk too far to bus stops and also walk too much to their final destination from their final bus stop.

Key Recommendations

- Have a better snow clearing plan for buses and routes.
- Being able to get to places more easily with less transfers.



Bussing

Bus Routing/Frequency of Routes

Key Issues

- Lack of transit in newly developed areas
- City of Edmonton only used able-bodied persons for walking times in walking between Bus or transit stops.
- Only certain areas have been privileged with on demand services.
- Seniors avoid going to events because they don't have transportation or it's not reliable.

Key Recommendations

- Consult people with disabilities when making/changing routes/frequency of buses
- Increase frequency of service.
- More accessible LRT, less bus exchanges, more direct routes from point to point
- Earlier bus times.



Bussing

Seating on Buses

Key Issues

- Sharing spaces with strollers makes it hard to have enough space for wheelchair users
- busses get very full and there is often not space for people living with disabilities to sit.
- When it's packed at busy times it is hard to get your scooters in the spots they need to go.
- People in walkers should not be sitting on their walker, they should be sitting on the seat in the bus.
- The new busses are narrower and they don't have much space for small scooters on there, never mind a larger one and there are no secure tie downs for the scooters.

Key Recommendations

- Buses should have more seating for disabled people.
- Disabled people should be consulted when the city is getting new buses to ensure accessibility is maintained.
- Improve training of bus drivers to help disabled people get on the bus and be seated safely.

Bussing

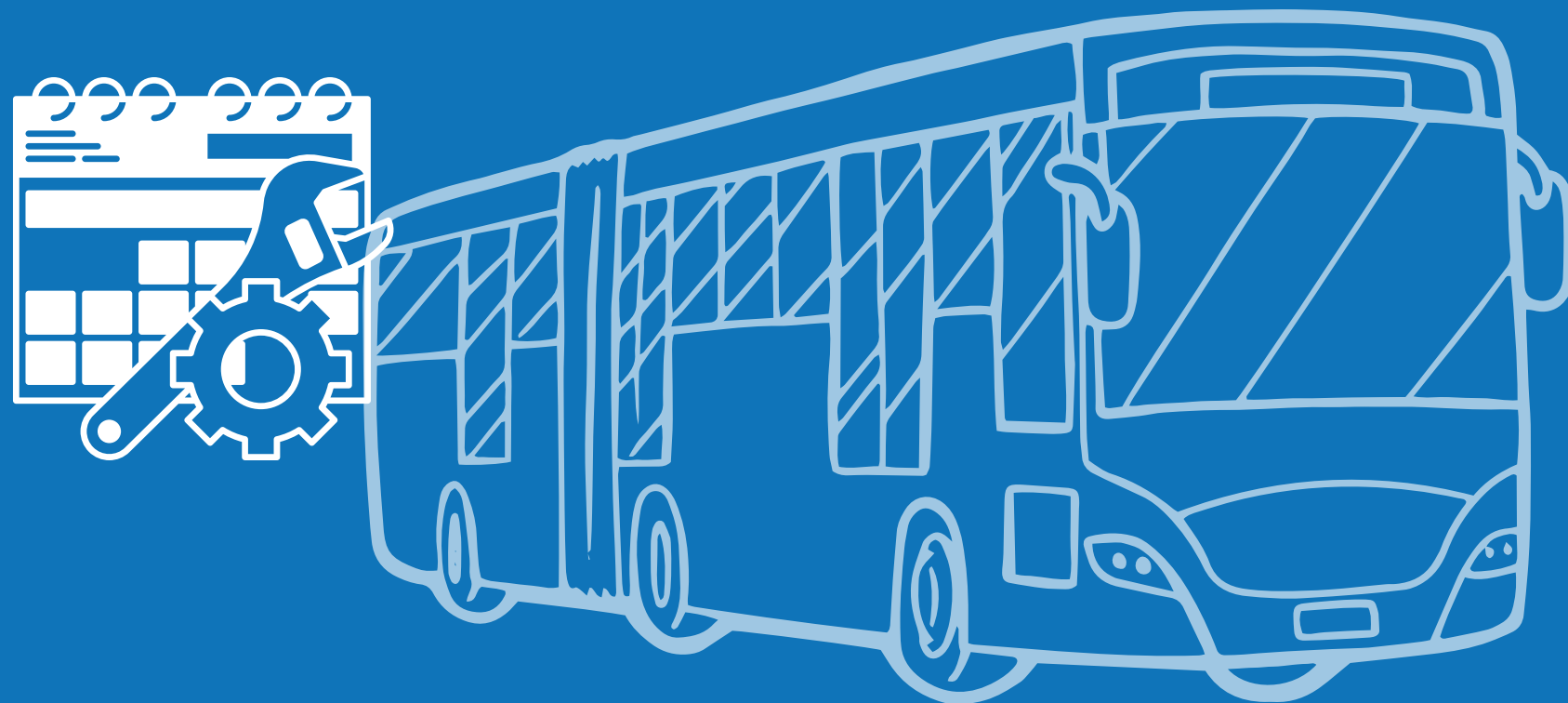
Deaf/Hard of Hearing People

Key Issues

- Find audio on the buses will be off in half the bus or quite quiet.
- Find that the digital display of the stops does not work sometimes.

Key Recommendations

- Better maintenance of audio and digital display.



DATS

SERVICE SATISFACTION AND FLEXIBILITY

Key Issues

- poor management and communications
- inefficient, ineffective, inconvenient, rigid, unreliable, not respecting of our time
- scheduling is terrible; arduous; frustrating
- unrealistic rules for clients and does not accommodate for emergencies or changes in medical appointments
- inability to book transportation without weeks notice

Key Recommendations

- update of booking system to simplify - prioritize the development of an app for ease, also create efficient non-tech access points for scheduling and maps
- audit of scheduling approach and build more flexibility to recognize life circumstances
- more drivers
- create ways for people to book DATS in emergency or immediate travel arrangement situations

DATS

QUALIFICATIONS FOR ACCESS

Key Issues

- visitors with disabilities are not able to ride
- application process is complex and lengthy
- renewal processes are challenging - if you have a permanent disability as verified by a doctor, there should not be processes to renew every year

Key Recommendations

- Simplify and make the application easier to fill out
- allow for temporary access for visitors
- people with verified permanent disabilities should not need to requalify for access

DATS

ASSESSING EFFICIENCIES AND CAPACITIES OF STAFF

Key Issues

- Drivers lack understanding and respect for the unique needs of folks living with disabilities; get frustrated and are rude; place blame
- Communication between office staff and drivers is challenging
- Not enough drivers

Key Recommendations

- every DATS vehicle should have 2 people, a driver and a helper
- collaboration with other Non-Profit Organizations (e.g. Drive Happiness)
- training for drivers in respect, communication with "clients", willingness to listen, and how to navigate equipment
- Improve communication between drivers and office staff

DATS

PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY, RESTRICTIONS AND SAFETY

Key Issues

- no ability to travel during evenings and weekends; cuts out social and economic opportunities
- limited to 2 bags on DATS, can't effectively grocery shop
- Two door SUVs being used which are very difficult to load into and unload
- drivers just drop and leave us without confirming we are able to enter a location

Key Recommendations

- create accessibility for weekends and after hours
- build partnerships with taxis etc for after hours
- engage folks with disabilities to build new models
- increase limit of bags for folks who need to shop or consider unique buses for shoppers
- any SUVs should be 4 door
- create routes and partnerships that allow access in the broader greater Edmonton region
- create a policy of drivers ensuring people can gain access into a space before leaving

LRT

Key Issue

- Inaccessible Stations and Trains

"getting on [the LRT] is a challenge - I use a mobility device and have to very quickly get to the correct doors that have a ramp to get on and then need to press the button to access the ramp. I have had it happen where at rush hour especially people crowd on and I can't reach the button and I end up not getting on the LRT."

Key Recommendations

- Consult with us on what our needs are before a system and/or a train gets put out there.
- Fixing the ramps is urgent. Clearly, not all ramps are useful or safe.
- Ensure LRT escalators and elevators are operational, and let people know when they are out of service. Ensure help is available immediately in case the elevator fails.
- Improve accessibility and navigation of spaces that connect LRT and bus stops.

LRT

Key Issue

- Cleanliness and Public Safety

“elevators are smelly. Maintenance and cleanliness is terrible [...] If you are using a wheelchair, it is unsanitary.”

“LRT stations is the only resource for people without a house, primarily in the downtown LRT stations. It does not make me feel safe; I use them but only with escorts.”

Key Recommendations

- More security on platforms for people with barriers
- Provide outreach supports for unhoused populations to reach a place where they can be served.

LRT

Key Issue

- Visual and Auditory Environments and Support Systems

"On the LRT when it is busy, I can not hear what stop is coming up next. The hearing aids pick up all the background noise. All I get is a condition called 'clutter'. Not knowing where you are at and only hearing all the clutter is actually quite scary. At pick hours it is really crowded, and I can't see visual displays which makes it difficult to know where I am at."

Key Recommendations

- Create a sensory room where people with sensory issues can go.
- Implement hearing loops in LRT stations
- Incorporate tactile maps near entrances of LRT stations

Moving Forward

A more comprehensive report with the outcomes of this research and project will be released early in 2023.

Increasing the awareness of the general public and all stakeholders involved in Edmonton City Transportation was a priority with this project. Ultimately our goal is also to see changes made which need to be addressed from the lens of people who live with disabilities.