

Austin Accessibility Assessment Improvement (AAAIM)

Objective: Funded by the Federal Transit Administration and facilitated by Texas Citizen Fund, AAAIM sought to resolve the long-standing challenge of barriers to access between/around fixed-route stops and their interface with the overall transportation environment for persons with disabilities. AAAIM addressed both physical and jurisdictional barriers. Physical challenges included broken sidewalks, nonexistent curb ramps, outdated bus schedules, and missing landing pads. Jurisdictional challenges were also addressed. In an arrangement common to many communities, transit agencies, such as Capital Metro, have control at the stop, while municipal governments have responsibility for the transportation environment to and from the stop. Bridging these distinct areas of jurisdiction, particularly when each entity has its own planning, programming, funding, and implementation processes often makes joint collaborations to remedy access challenges difficult.

A partnership of the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the City of Austin, Easter Seals Project ACTION, and fixed-route passengers with disabilities, AAAIM's collaborative approach, process, and outcomes are rooted in context-sensitive principles, as they address both the decision-making process and project outcomes.

Persons with disabilities were meaningfully engaged throughout the project

- **Identifying challenges:** AAAIM used a telephone survey to contact 10% of CapMetro Disability Fare Card customers, passengers with medically-verified disabilities who use fixed-route services, to understand and document their accessibility, design, and service needs. Survey participants were specifically asked to identify locations where travel to, from, and at the stop was complicated or prevented by barriers. This initial list of stops was distilled to 40 priority stops based on ridership volumes and location along transit corridors.
- **Assessing bus stops/travel paths:** Having recruited a cadre of trained persons who represented a wide range of disabilities; AAAIM trained, deployed and paid fifteen Assessment Team Members, or ATMs. Working in pairs with a systematic tool used to gather their input, ATMs identified challenges at, to, and from each stop.
- **Recommending improvements that considered the total context within the transportation project exists:** ATMs recommended improvements that often required action by and coordination between Capital Metro and the City of Austin with an emphasis on increasing pedestrian and transit users' safe access.

AAAIM's input informs the planning, programming, implementation, and policy development of CapMetro, the City's Transportation Department, and the City of Austin's long-term mobility planning

- **CapMetro:** Serving 3200 bus stops within a 500 square mile area, the assessment process was strategically used by CapMetro as a filter to identify those short-term solutions, such as ensuring current schedule information was available at every stop, that could be implemented as part of regular maintenance and those that would require careful review and analysis by CapMetro's technical staff. By identifying priority stops and improvements, AAAIM provided on-the-ground input that supports both access and excellent customer service. CapMetro is beginning an inter-agency discussion on standardizing the location of route poles, seeking to strike a balance between competing demands.
- **City of Austin:** With more than 3500 linear miles of missing sidewalk segments, AAAIM's work provides a check on the prioritization of the recently adopted Sidewalk Master Plan and a focus for action. The City's Transportation Department is currently sorting issues raised by AAAIM into maintenance challenges, identifying missing accessibility pieces, and developing long-term infrastructure improvements with improvements proceeding toward resolution.
- **Long-term Mobility Planning:** As the City moves forward on its Strategic Mobility Plan, the access barriers and gaps that AAAIM identified will be included in this multi-modal, bottoms-up analytical process. Similarly, these concerns will be forwarded as the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization moves forward on the adoption of its 2035 Long-Range Plan in June 2010.

For further information, contact:

Ms. Sheila Holbrook-White, Texas Citizen Fund

512 699 8136

TexasCitizenFund@gmail.com

Ms. Lee Austin, City of Austin Transportation Department Engineer

512 974 7681

Lee.Austin@ci.austin.tx.us

Mr. Roberto Gonzalez, CapMetro Principal Planner

512 389 7400

Roberto.Gonzalez@capmetro.org

Mr. Glenn Gadbois, Gadbois Consulting Principal

512 294 7446

Gadbois@mindspring.com