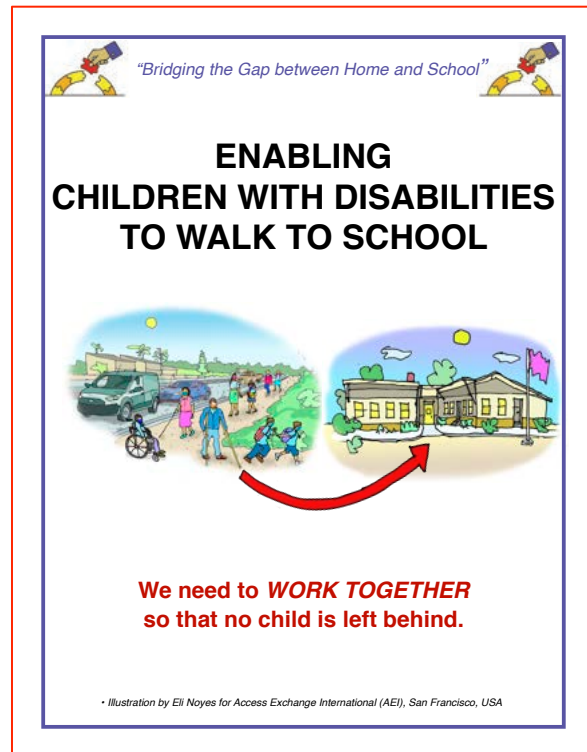


Accessible Transportation Around the World

The Newsletter of
Access Exchange International
January 2021



AEI releases two toolkits to assist riding and walking/rolling to school



Helping children with disabilities to return to their classrooms

Families of children and youth with disabilities face daunting issues as schools gradually reopen in countries around the world.

Will the gap in educational attainment between children with and without disabilities increase still more as transportation – when available – is faced with increased burdens due to safety measures required by the pandemic? Or could school and other officials work with parents to come up with creative solutions to this mega-problem impacting tens of millions of children with special needs?

These issues are fundamental. Both public transport planners and school transport planners in all countries are faced with drastic changes as we begin to rethink who we are and what we do.

Fortunately, AEI has decades of experience in promoting the inclusive design and operation of public transit, which in some countries is the only transport available to most school children. And we have the pro bono assistance of Pete Meslin, the retired Transportation Director of a large school district in southern California, plus the guidance of Janett Jiménez Santos, an architect with a specialty in inclusive public space who is a consultant for Mexican federal and state governments when not volunteering her time for AEI.

(continued on page 2 →)

On the inside: AEI's upcoming report; Our unusual beginning 30 years ago; Roundtable on January 28; News from Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, the USA, and Uruguay.

Bus stops without borders Good bus stop design helps everybody



Accessible bus stop design has spread around the world, allowing wheelchair users and other passengers with disabilities to enter the bus stop area. At right, a bus stop in Pune, India, from an ITDP publication. At left, bus stop design in Santiago, Chile, courtesy of Ciudad Accesible. The Spanish text refers to design elements that permit easy passage as well as providing a tactile surface to assist passengers to locate the curb.

AEI resumes research on school transit in contiguous USA & Mexican border states

After delays caused by the current pandemic, Access Exchange International has renewed its research for a report with recommendations on school transportation for Hispanic children and youth in the ten contiguous USA and Mexican states that share our common border. The map below depicts the ten-state region.

Current work includes interviews with Spanish-speaking parents of Latino students in San Francisco arranged for AEI through the staff of Support for Families of Children with Disabilities, a non-profit agency which has served families with students in local schools for the past 38 years.

AEI's report is partially funded by the United Methodist Church in San Francisco. It will include case studies from Baja California and Texas while looking at demographic data from all ten states.



The first 21 annual meetings of our Roundtable in Washington DC required people to travel to Washington. Now you can attend from anywhere in the world.

Sponsored free of charge by AEI (USA) & ICSA (Canada)
22nd Annual International Roundtable set for Jan. 28 via Zoom: Register now!

Our 22nd annual Roundtable on Inclusive Transportation in Developing Countries is planned via Zoom on Thursday, January 28. The three-hour event will begin at 7 a.m. on the USA's west coast and later that day for others (e.g., 10 a.m. in New York, 3 p.m. in London, 5 p.m. in Cape Town, 8:30 p.m. in Delhi.)

This will be an unusual opportunity for many friends and colleagues around the world to attend this event for the first time. Pre-registration is required. We plan on 10-minute presentations on public transport, school transport, and door-to-door modes in developing countries with added time for informal discussion. Our focus is on persons with disabilities but also includes other vulnerable groups. Contact AEI at tom@globalride-sf.org for further details. We strongly suggest that colleagues with presentations contact us quickly while space remains. Special needs of presenters with evening time slots will be taken into consideration.

Looking back over the past thirty years of our work

AEI was born as part of a movement toward "citizen diplomacy"

We are in a time of global stress, and of fraught relationships between the USA and Russia, to say nothing of fraught relationships between different factions within the USA itself. It may even seem quaint for some of our American readers, but the factors that led to the creation of Access Exchange International in 1990 included a wave of optimism and of mutual discovery that occurred when private citizens in the USA and the then-Soviet Union started talking to each other in the 1980s.

Something was trying to emerge in the late 1980s. To quote Jim Garrison, "It was one of those moments when you could feel history coursing through your being." Perhaps this grew out of the imminence of nuclear warfare that characterized the 1960s – our older readers will remember the Cuban missile crisis. They will remember the school children practicing hiding under their desks if there was an atomic attack. That global stress continued into the 1980s. Remember "The Day After," the TV series about a nuclear apocalypse that was watched by more than 100 million Americans?

Yet, at the same time, private citizens in the USA and in what is now Russia or Ukraine began to visit each other and to discover the humanity in each other. Tom & Susan Rickert joined with many others, helping to host dozens of social workers, children, business men (they were all male at that time), psychologists, artists, writers and others from the then Soviet Union in their home and the homes of friends in San Francisco.

Tom and Susan deepened that involvement through a Quaker-sponsored peace tour of the Soviet Union around 1988. They noticed that persons with disabilities simply were not seen on the streets of Moscow. "We don't have disabled people over here" was even intimated as a virtue of communism! Nor were matters that much better in the USA. If you are older, do you remember how many people using wheelchairs were visible on the buses and streetcars of San Francisco in the 1970s? Just about zero would be the correct answer. One AEI Board member, Bruce Oka, remembers dragging himself up the stairs on the Muni's 38-Geary line back in those days, dragging his wheelchair behind him. No, Moscow wasn't *that* far behind San Francisco.

So perhaps it wasn't so surprising that Tom, who was then manager of accessible services for the San Francisco Muni, had what turned out to be a life-changing experience in January, 1990, as he took a bus up Van Ness Avenue to return to his office from a meeting at San Francisco's City Hall. "Call it a mystical experience if you like," Tom says, "but it was a clear realization that I must step down from my job at the Muni and devote my life to improving access to public transportation for persons with disabilities in less-wealthy countries around the world. It doesn't feel strange that I am still doing this thirty years later." A few weeks after this 'call,' Tom and his colleagues began testing ramped raised platforms with Muni vehicles to check out the feasibility of using them to board buses and rail cars in less-wealthy countries. See



1992: This photo illustrates the support AEI received from both the disability community and the public transport community. Shown above are engineers from the San Francisco Muni, AEI staff and officers, and three pioneering disability activists who have now passed on: George Moore, John Edmonds, and Griffith Humphrey (bottom, from left). Edmonds was an engineer and the first to advocate for the use of ramped platforms to make the Muni more accessible.

the photo on page 6 for a current version of these platforms on San Francisco's Muni Metro.

A few months after that, Tom stepped down from the Muni to found Access Exchange International (AEI). He still remembers his farewell luncheon at an Italian restaurant in San Francisco's North Beach in September of 1990. "My co-workers at the Muni 'got it'," Tom says. "To this day, more than half the people at that luncheon remain faithful supporters of our work. I am buoyed up by the encouragement of my colleagues in San Francisco and elsewhere in the USA and around the world."

But matters were not so obvious back in 1990, as Tom and Sue each had to put \$10,000 of their own funds into the pot just to pay travel and office costs to keep the lights on at AEI. Naturally enough, their first outreach was to the Soviet Union as an extension of their "citizen diplomacy" to Russian guests in their own home in San Francisco. These guests were meeting Americans and learning about the complexities of life in the USA, thanks to the efforts of Vladimir Preobrazhensky, a Russian visionary living in Moscow.

But now the visits became more focused, and the citizen diplomacy took a more official turn as a grant from US AID, through World Learning, finally gave AEI the ability to hire a consultant – Valeria Sviatkina – to represent our agency in the early 1990s to public transport and emerging non-profit agencies in her home town of Moscow. "These were our first presentations," Tom remembers, "and we little realized that thirty years later I and my colleagues would have visited eighty cities in thirty-six countries. But that is our origin story, that is how we came to be. And it was still a matter of individual citizens rising to the occasion. I remember Galina Bodrenkova of Moscow Charity House putting together a coalition of emerging non-profit agencies to promote door-to-door paratransit services in a city where everything had either been done by the government or not done at all. I remember our meetings with Alexandr Ulyanov, the head of Moscow's transit system of 10,000 buses, trams, and trolleys, as they were exploring options to make their own vehicles accessible. Russia has made tremendous gains since that

time and it was our privilege to be in at the beginning of some of those changes."

But that was then, and now our thoughts turn to 2021 and the tasks before our agency in the year ahead. It is a different world and the dangers we all faced thirty years ago are more complicated. But the challenge remains the same: to recognize each other's humanity, to be kind to one another, to build bridges between people and nations, to unite and not to divide, and to address the needs of our global society with patience, one step at a time. Our work on mass transit and door-to-door paratransit and school transportation must be based on these simple priorities while remaining true to our mission. Our tasks are idealistic yet practical.

Let's not end up using our technologies to destroy ourselves, like we came closer to doing than we realized a few decades ago. May God grant us the wisdom to understand these simple things.



1992: A meeting of social service agencies, disability groups, transit providers, and city government agencies met in Moscow's ornate City Hall to promote a planning process to develop accessible public transit and door-to-door paratransit services for persons with disabilities in Moscow.

The meeting was held in response to an invitation from Moscow Charity House, Preodolenie (a Moscow Independent Living Center), and Access Exchange International. Galina Bodrenkova (standing, fifth from right) was Director of Moscow Charity House and a member of the Moscow City Council. Dimitri Senjukov, director of Preodolenie, is seated at right. Tom Rickert of AEI is standing, third from right.

The meeting sharpened the focus of AEI from general support of social services in what we then called "the San Francisco-Moscow Social Services Project" to prioritize the transportation needed by persons with disabilities in order to live independently.

News and Notes from Around the World



URUGUAY: 43% of Montevideo's 1,500+ public transit buses are now accessible, including 20 new electric-powered buses (photo) belonging to CUTCSA, South America's largest privately operated bus company and Uruguay's largest transportation provider. By regulation, all new public transport buses in Montevideo must be "low floor" or "low entry" with a ramp available to wheelchair users and other passengers with mobility aids, a dedicated space for wheelchair securement, and a dedicated seat for blind persons with space available for a dog guide.

The accessibility requirements were drawn up by the National Transport Directorate in line with technical criteria defined by the Uruguayan Institute of Technical Norms (UNIT) in line with standards similar to those of the European Union. UNIT's certification symbol for the accessible buses is shown in the graphic. Half of the population of Uruguay lives in Montevideo, and the country is regarded as one of the most progressive in the western hemisphere. When it comes to "mobility for all," it appears that Uruguay is again a country in the lead. (Graphics from CUTCSA and UNIT. Sources: Eduardo Alvarez, Sandra Lemes Lete, & Teresita Amarillo)



BRAZIL: A report from Brazil indicates how a door-to-door service aimed at adults with disabilities can stimulate expansion to nearby cities and to the creation of school transportation as well. *Atende*, a pioneering door-to-door service in São Paulo, Brazil, is now in its 24th year. *Atende* continues to provide good service, carrying 1.5 million passengers with disabilities and their companions with almost 900,000 trips in 2019, with a service satisfaction score of 9.2 out of 10. The service is fully subsidized by the city under the umbrella of SPTrans, one of the larger public transit operations in the Americas.

Based on the success of *Atende*, a service was then initiated in 2009 to provide transportation to school children and youth with disabilities via a service called *Ligado*, as reported in AEI's January 2010 Newsletter available on our website. Nine years later in 2019, the more than 500 vehicles working with *Ligado* provided 4,700 students with special needs, and around 600 companions, with some 2.5 million trips to nearly one thousand schools in the state of São Paulo. Service is focused on low-income families. Service satisfaction has remained above 90% throughout the past decade.

Atende's service was also replicated in the nearby city of São José Dos Campos and was upgraded in 2018 with improved technology that makes the service more cost-effective. This service, called *Acesso Já*, has 233 registered vehicles serving nearly 900 registered persons with disabilities, of whom nearly 400 use adapted vehicles with special accessibility features. (Sources: Paula Manoela dos Santos of WRI Brazil & AEI newsletters)

NIGERIA: In August, the governing council of Nigeria's new National Commission for Persons with Disabilities was formed. Six of the seven members of the council are persons with disabilities with significant experience from the six geopolitical regions of the country. The composition of the commission is in line with the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2019, reported in AEI's June Newsletter. It is hoped that the act's transport provisions will lead to progress. (Source: Prof. Paul Ajuwon of Missouri State University.)

CANADA: Contact tracey.shipman@gaates.org to get on their monthly list to receive Global Accessibility News, with a focus which includes electronic information and communication technologies.



USA: San Francisco's public transport agency has constructed temporary platforms (photo above) for passengers with disabilities to handle re-routing on its light rail Metro system when service is restored as the

pandemic eases. The platforms supplement the approx. one hundred accessible platforms already found on the system. Shown in the photo is a mother with a child using a stroller. San Francisco's buses, trolley-buses and light rail Metro systems permit children to remain in strollers using special areas which are prioritized for such use, but difficulties remain when seat locations are unclear for some passengers with disabilities or for other passengers. (Photo by Liz Brisson of SFMTA)



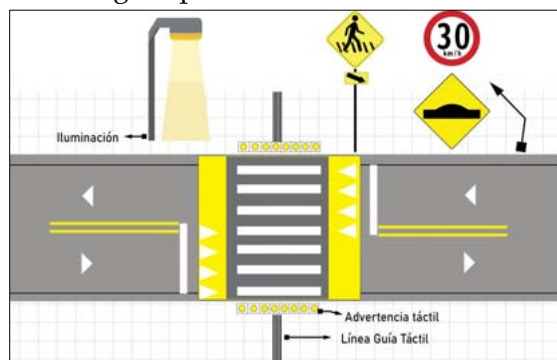
RUSSIA:



Paratransit continues to be a useful mode of transport for persons with disabilities in Moscow, using Russia's "Social Taxi" system (photo above). The growth of the system in other cities is notable, as shown by the recent event depicted in the south-western Siberian city of Novokuznetsk in the photo below from Valeria Sviatkina, AEI's consultant in Russia in the 1990s. The mid-size city has a population of somewhat more than a half million persons.



CHILE: Ciudad Accesible (Accessible City) in Chile is advocating increased use of traffic calming to slow down traffic and protect intersections or crossings. The diagram below indicates features needed to protect persons with disabilities as well as everyone else, especially in crossings needed in the middle of long blocks. Features include good lighting, signage, a speed bump to slow traffic, tactile guideways and a tactile warning strips.



MEXICO: The photo below from Durango, Mexico illustrates a bicycle path made more inclusive to accommodate wheelchair users. The photo also illustrates use by a blind pedestrian, who in this case has opted for the adjacent sidewalk where he can use nearby guiding elements such as the side of the building. Also see the drawing on page 2. (Photo from Durango city government, sent by Janett Jiménez, from *El Sol de Durango*, Nov. 4, 2020)



Looking to the future . . .

TRANSED 2022 planning moves ahead

TRANSED is the leading conference series promoting inclusive and accessible transportation for elderly persons, passengers with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The TRANSED planning group, within the TRB Committee on Accessible Transportation & Mobility, is considering September 2022 as their target date for the next TRANSED, planned for Seattle, Washington, on the USA's west coast. Both virtual and in-person sessions are being planned, subject to the uncertainties of the current epidemic.

A Call for Papers on the Transportation Research Board website will be opened shortly, with a focus on policies and strategies for inclusion as well as techniques to plan resiliency in bus, paratransit, rail, air travel, and walking modes. Papers on information, communications and wayfinding are sought, as well as papers on artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous vehicles, and smart communications to support accessible transport.

Go to www.transedconferences.com to keep in touch with conference happenings. Contact the Secretariat at secretariat.transed2022@gmail.com with specific questions.

A long-overdue revision is under way

Back in 2004, the UK's Dept. of International Development and TRL Ltd. published *Enhancing the mobility of disabled people: Guidelines for practitioners*, authored by a team from TRL, CSIR in South Africa, AEI, and India's Central Institute of Road Transport. The nearly 200-page guide remains one of the most comprehensive publications in our field, but sixteen years later it stands in need of revision. AEI welcomes this needed revision by Integrated Transport Planning, Ltd. (ITP) in the UK, and hopes to keep our readers informed as ITP moves ahead with this project.

Developmental Disabilities Update Set for March

A live-stream virtual conference for health care professionals and others is planned for March 25-26, 2021, sponsored by the School of Medicine and School of Nursing of the Univ. of California, San Francisco.

The conference will span the breadth of developmental disabilities matters across life spans, highlighting several presentations on the effects of racial disparities and of the current pandemic on people with disabilities. These topics have implications for school transportation issues. The event will be co-chaired by Dr. Lucy Crain, an officer of Access Exchange International. For information and registration, go to cme.ucsf.edu or call 1-415-476-5808. The two days of morning and afternoon sessions will be held in the USA's Pacific Time Zone.

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Photo from an AEI Board meeting shows (top row) Pete Meslin, guest; Ike Nnaji; Tom Rickert, Executive Director; Susan Rickert, staff volunteer; Peter Straus; Susan Worts, Vice-President; Richard Weiner, President; Lucy Crain, Treasurer; and Janett Jiménez Santos, guest. Seated: Bruce Oka, Secretary, and Cheryl Damico.

How you can support the work of AEI

AEI is a non-profit agency, tax exempt under Article 501(c)(3) of the USA's Internal Revenue Code. Here are three ways to donate to our work:

- In most countries, go to **PayPal** at the donation section of our website at www.globalride-sf.org.
- **Mail a check** to "Access Exchange International,"
112 San Pablo Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94127-1536
- For some people, a **donor-advised fund** can enable donors to receive maximum tax benefits while supporting the causes they care about. Interested? Contact a brokerage or agency such as the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund, the Vanguard Charitable Endowment Program, or a well know public foundation such as the San Francisco Foundation. For example, one donor recently sent us the proceeds of a stock sale after setting up such a fund with Schwab Charitable. Capital gains taxes may be avoided by first putting stock or other assets into such a fund.

AEI's employer identification number (EIN) is 94-3138135. Contact us if you have any questions.