

Celebrating 25 years



Accessible Transportation Around the World

The Newsletter of
Access Exchange International
January 2017

Setting a standard for other countries . . . Mexico ranks the accessibility of its Bus Rapid Transit lines



In a pioneering review of sixteen BRT corridors in Mexico, an agency located in Mexico City has created a first-ever evaluation of the access features for 573 bus rapid transit stations in Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Chihuahua,

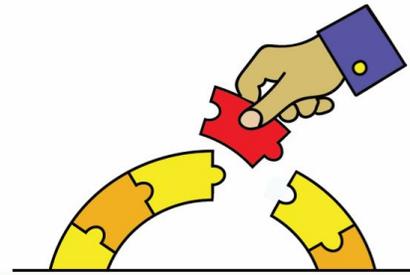
Puebla, León, Pachuca, Ciudad Juárez, and the State of Mexico.

Backed by thousands of on-site photos and detailed technical analysis, the evaluation covers access at stations, connectivity to public space, operational features, interior design of both vehicles and stations, and access to other modes of transport. An extensive summary of the Spanish evaluation is available in English at <http://elpoderdelconsumidor.org/brt-accessibility/>

Scoring highest: Line 5 of Metrobús in Mexico City
Coming in last: Vivebús in Ciudad Juárez

But the point of this evaluation is to encourage all cities to improve existing and future systems, and no system was perfect, according to El Poder del Consumidor (Consumer Power), the non-profit agency undertaking this task as part of its larger programs including other aspects of public trans-

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Coming by February: *Bridging the Gap*

(Illustrations for AEI by Eli Noyes, Alligator Planet LLC)

Our guide to help improve school transportation for children with disabilities is planned for completion by February. Stage one will be the publication of the English version of the guide, *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries*. A Spanish version is also planned.

The title of our guide refers to the need for more school buses and other transport services for students with disabilities who require them, and more accessible and safer paths for those who can walk to school in both urban and rural areas. Transportation is a major contributing reason why many children with disabilities are unable to ride or walk to attend school in developing regions.



Our case studies from fourteen countries, survey results from schools in Africa, and personal interviews with school principals indicate that help is needed to overcome these obstacles. For example, 74% of responding schools report that footpaths are unsafe, with 88% noting that the walkways are not even safely separated from the road. Yet public transportation is usually inaccessible in most developing countries and school bus systems usually do not exist.

Our 100+ page guide will help quantify these and other issues while recommending practical

Also on the inside:

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Roundtable in DC

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from around the world

steps by policy-makers and implementers to make it easier for children with disabilities to walk or ride to school. [To Page 5 →](#)



Tom Rickert of AEI provided a video presentation in Spanish (above) at an event presenting the completed evaluation to bus rapid transit practitioners and other stakeholders in Mexico City in July. – Photo courtesy of El Poder del Consumidor

Measuring BRT accessibility

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portation. The agency notes that bus rapid transit is one of the best mobility options in large cities. BRT in Mexico already serves more than three million users and lends itself to access by persons with disabilities as well as everyone else needing transportation. The purpose of the evaluation was to rate the systems against objective accessibility criteria in order to identify needed improvements as well as to incorporate good practices in new routes. Mexican authorities are now considering activities to follow up this evaluation.

Mexico is the first country to carry out a comprehensive study of BRT accessibility at a national level. AEI is pleased to publicize this good practice in order to encourage emulation in other countries, including those with multiple BRT lines such as China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, [To Page 3 →](#)

Photo upper left: Panelists at presentation of BRT ranking: From left, Joaquín Alva Ruíz-Cabañas, Deputy Director General of Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights; Daniel Zamudio (El Poder del Consumidor); Janett Jiménez Santos, Consultant on Accessibility; Víctor Alvarado, producer of the BRT evaluation by El Poder del Consumidor; and Pedro López Fernández, Coordinator of the Accessibility Committee of ASOCIVE.

Photo at left: Opening of BRT Line 6 in Mexico City in January 2016. New lines continue to be added as the system keeps growing to meet the needs of one of the world's largest cities.



Can Mexico initiate a global march toward more inclusive BRT systems?

(from Page 2) Colombia, and Nigeria. The quality of access features is often uneven between countries, between cities within countries, and between different bus rapid transit lines within the same city.

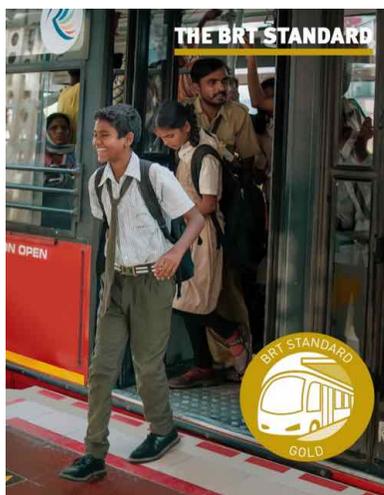
The Mexican study commended cities which improved their BRT systems by learning from earlier omissions. The study cited five BRT lines in Mexico City as evidence of this process, with each new line learning from its predecessors. It is just as important that countries learn from other countries to avoid making needless mistakes.

Progress in Thailand

For example, our colleague Joseph Kwan in Hong Kong has referred us to Sawang Srisom, Project Manager of the Transportation for All (T4A) initiative in Bangkok. AEI has introduced these Thai and Mexican colleagues to each other with the hope that they may move toward a more international approach to the definition of integrated standards for public transportation that connect up all modes of riding and walking. Such standards then need follow-up with access audits to determine their alignment with these standards. We wish to encourage this technical process, while also encouraging advocacy so that everyone reading this newsletter can benefit from a wide enough sidewalk, a proper angle to a ramp at a bus entrance, the presence of a reserved seat if they are seniors or have a disability, and all the features they need to get to their destination.

Measuring and commending a high standard

Mexico's assessment of the accessibility features of its BRT lines in nine cities is a more focused



concept than "The BRT Standard" used by the Institute for Transportation Development and Policy (ITDP) to rank BRT systems around the world (photo). The ITDP standard awards the best systems with a "gold," followed by a "silver" and "bronze" ranking.

That standard addresses some accessibility issues, but with a less detailed approach. Setting standards and ranking projects can be controversial, as different bus rapid transit lines face different challenges. Yet the study in Mexico takes the need for "mobility for all" to a new level by investing the resources and talent to not only carry out the evaluation but also to recommend needed changes and work with appropriate agencies to establish norms to carry them out. It has long been needed.



A movable bridge, deployed from the platform of this bus rapid transit station in Yichang, China, eliminates the station-to-bus gap for all passengers. If the bridge deploys while the bus doors are opening, travel time would not be effected. – ITDP photo forwarded by Gerhard Menckhoff

Yichang, China, pioneers a new solution to the BRT bus-to-platform gap

The Mexican study found that none of its BRT lines could consistently meet a standard of no more than 10 cm distance between the edge of the station platform and the floor of the bus. Yichang, China, addresses this concern with a platform-mounted bridge. Approaches using bridges attached to buses, or modified platform edges, have been inconsistently used in many countries. Bus-mounted bridges may cause delays in some cases, but other approaches can create dangerous gaps which require extra caution by all passengers. Yichang may have come up with a solution.

Mexico's BRT access evaluation and the work cited in Thailand and China depict actions that promote the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 10.2 and 11.2, targeting inclusion and access by persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Transport to school is a key to inclusive education for all



THE GAP: Millions of children with disabilities cannot get to school. Transportation is a missing piece of the puzzle. The illustration below depicts the goal: a school with children with disabilities learning alongside other children. Children walk and ride to school in many different ways.



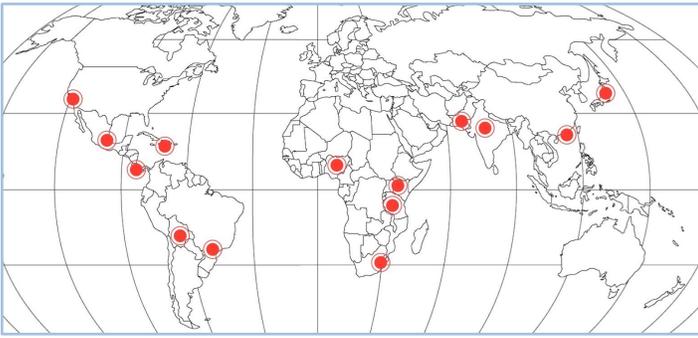
WALKABILITY: Schools, governments, and the international community need to work together to build and maintain safe footpaths so that children can walk (or use a wheelchair or bicycle) to get to and from school. For many children in rural areas, walking or being carried is the only way to get to school.



AFFORDABLE TRANSPORT: Smaller "three wheelers" usually charge less than larger vehicles. Their use should be encouraged when appropriate. Most households with children with disabilities are headed by the mother. They are often very low-income. Transportation fares must be subsidized if they can be expected to send their children to school.



SCHOOL BUSES: School transport systems are not available for most children with disabilities in low- and low-medium-income countries. We advocate scaling up school transport with provision of vehicles and long-term maintenance by schools and other agencies. Drivers and attendants need disability-awareness training. Local communities can play a big role by ridesharing and other help in cities and in rural areas.



The map depicts sites for case studies in *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries.*

Transport to school guide (continued)

These recommendations come from those with first-hand knowledge of their local realities, and include case studies which will appear in our guide, now in its final stages of preparation. Case studies concern helpful practices in many countries, and also describe challenging transport situations such as those detailed in our past newsletters from Mexico, Pakistan, Bolivia, and Tanzania.

An early draft of our guide received comments from twenty external reviewers from eight countries. Their comments have served to strengthen this guide, while also calling our attention to the sheer complexity of the school transport situation. Thanks to our collaboration with Professor Paul Ajuwon of Missouri State University (USA), we also analyzed the responses of more than forty schools from Sub-Saharan Africa which provided a wealth of information from a region where most children with disabilities are not attending school.

TO OUR READERS IN 80 COUNTRIES

YOU CAN HELP US TO BRIDGE THE GAP

- Promote needed transportation for children with disabilities in your city or country.
- Send us contact information for interested transport practitioners, principals, teachers, and school officials. We also thank Maureen Blumenthal for her research as we build up a list of education and transportation ministries around the world to receive our guide and to keep informed about practices in school transportation.



Faculty members Oscar Ignacio Guerra Nunez and Betsy J. Blosser of the Broadcast & Electronic Communication Arts Dept. of San Francisco State University, at a meeting with Tom Rickert of AEI.

San Francisco State videos to illustrate the challenges of school transport

A team of faculty and students from San Francisco State University has been invited to visit different locales in Mexico in June, 2017, to prepare videos "to put a human face" on challenges faced by children with disabilities when travelling to and from school. The initiative is a result of collaboration between Janett Jiménez and other key practitioners in Mexico, SFSU, and AEI. The goal of the project is to prepare bilingual videos for use by advocates for children with disabilities

A great idea in Quito, Ecuador

Passengers at an accessible bus rapid transit station in Quito have a direct connection with school buses ("Expreso Escolar") at this BRT station.

- Photo by Janett Jiménez Santos



When it comes to inclusive transport
Lessons big and small that we
have learned these past 25 years

1. Accessibility is one of the first victims of violence and corruption in any country.
2. Bottom-up advocacy and top-down government planning are needed, but *both* benefit from the "horizontal" spread of ideas when cities and countries learn from each other.
3. If no one is charged with *implementing* inclusive transportation, it will not happen. *Signing* the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is only a first step!
4. Truly inclusive public transportation must include (1) accessible "fixed-route" bus and rail lines, (2) accessible door-to-door transport via taxi, van, or other small vehicles, *and* (3) accessible footways, sidewalks, and street crossings.
5. Elected officials need to make sure that transport, public works, traffic police, and other agencies work together. Tactile guideways for blind pedestrians that lead smack into utility boxes are one of many things that can go wrong.
6. When newly accessible buses are phased in, it usually is better to make one line after another totally accessible than to "sprinkle" those buses on many lines. This keeps the service reliable and attracts passengers with disabilities who are using the service for the first time.
7. Opening day is not the time to evaluate how a new transit line will work. As a matter of fact, a lot can go wrong on opening day.
8. It helps to first phase in door-to-door paratransit services on a small level and quickly learn from experience before enlarging the service. Avoid promising what you cannot deliver. Adding on service is easier than cutting service.
9. It's a lot easier to install curb ramps in new construction than along older streets. Less-wealthy countries could consider "attention patterns" (raised truncated domes) stamped into yellow-colored concrete. *If* plastic inserts are low quality, they may curl and become a trip hazard.
10. Inclusive transport and pedestrian pathways are increasingly found in big cities, but smaller towns may lag far behind. Rural areas may be untouched. A good beginning has been made these past 25 years, but it is just a beginning.



Disability leaders and others gathered in Ecuador this past October: A "new urban agenda" was adopted in Quito, Ecuador, to serve as a guide to the development of urban areas over the next twenty years, developing the themes of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and earlier documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. More than 30,000 persons took part in the gathering.



Bolivian workshop leaders met counterparts from the USA at a special education conference at the Walter Henry Methodist School in Santa Cruz this past June. Gretel Silvestre of the Dominican Republic, a member of our team preparing our school transport guide, made a presentation to the group.

Access Exchange International

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AEI is tax-exempt under Article 501(c)(3) of the USA's Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to our work from USA donors are tax-deductible. Each dollar of donations is more than matched by cost sharing. Financial compilations are available.

Inclusive transport in developing countries **18th international roundtable set for Washington DC on January 12, 2017**

AEI (USA) and ICSA (Canada) are pleased to announce our annual Roundtable, planned for Thursday morning, January 12, 2017, in downtown Washington at the headquarters of APTA – the American Public Transportation Assn. – at 1300 "I" Street NW in Washington. The site is some four blocks from the White House, and easily accessed from the Metro Center and McPherson Square Metro stations.

The event includes updates on all modes of accessible transportation. Following up our current emphasis on transport-to-school for children with disabilities, we especially encourage reports on this topic as well as other aspects of both urban and rural transport in developing countries. The emphasis is on an informal atmosphere and mutual dialogue among colleagues from many nations.

Security arrangements in this building require pre-registration with AEI. Space is limited and pre-registration is "first come, first served." We suggest you contact us at tom@globalride-sf.org, well before our final registration deadline of Friday, January 6.

For nearly two decades APTA has offered us the use of their facilities as a public service. We again thank APTA for hosting this roundtable, while also thanking Ling Suen and ICSA in Canada for co-sponsoring this unique event.

Thanking other friends and colleagues who make our work possible

Many friends of Access Exchange International volunteer their time and resources to make our work possible on a shoestring budget.

We thank our office volunteer Maureen Blumenthal

"Mo" Blumenthal grew up in the then Belgian Congo before moving as a child to Zimbabwe and then on to South Africa. (She was the water-skiing champion of South Africa "back in the day.") She is now in her eighth year serving as an office volunteer, driving south from her home in Inverness to San Francisco each month to maintain our mailing list of some 1,900 addresses in 80+ countries.

Much appreciation to Tanya Slesnick, CPA

We first met Tanya when she provided accounting services for our work in Russia in the early 1990s. Her pro bono services have included audits and compilations of our annual finances for some twenty years.

A warm thank-you to Gerhard and Pati Menckhoff

Ever wonder how our agency can afford those expensive Washington DC hotels when we travel there each January? The answer is that we have stayed at the Menckhoff residence in Washington during our stays for many years now.

Our Board of Directors (photo below) donates their time and resources to our work, meeting quarterly while also serving as a constant resource to our Executive Director. Board members are active in their fields of transportation, social service, and health. Nicolas Finck, a past President of our Board, is donating his editing skills for our transport-to school guide and for this newsletter.



Office space and utilities are provided free of charge by Tom and Sue Rickert in their home.

Susan Rickert volunteers her time to assist AEI and host meetings in their home. Her own work focuses on gathering funds to build and equip schools and clinics in east Africa. She is a former USA Peace Corps volunteer in Tanzania.

Tom Rickert provides three quarters of his staff time to AEI without pay. Donated staff time came to 1,400 pro bono hours in 2014 & 1,350 hours in 2015.

We need, and welcome, your donation to keep the wheels turning here at Access Exchange International! See page 6 for our address or go to our website to donate via PayPal.

News and Notes from Around the World

ASIA India: More than 100 railway stations are currently receiving accessibility audits by order of the Bombay High Court, assessing the need for ramps, tactile guideways, accessible platforms and other access features. (Indianexpress via GAATES). . . . Similar concerns about rail access are reported in Malaysia with KTM stations there. . . . United Arab Emirates: A Canadian organization, GAATES (www.gaates.org) has been selected to assist with a new project to ensure Dubai will be accessible for persons with disabilities and seniors in time for its Expo 2020. GAATES will work with local agencies to develop the Emirate's Universal Accessibility Strategy and Action Plan.

LATIN AMERICA Brazil: A design competition sponsored by WRI Brazil's Sustainable Cities project in the city of Belo Horizonte received proposals for the hilly surroundings of a school for children with disabilities called Associação Mineira de Reabilitação, writes Paula Santos Rocha of WRI. (Ed. - Design contests to improve access to schools could contribute to inclusive education initiatives in other countries, thinking, for example, of the initiative of NOWPDP in Pakistan – reported in our previous newsletter – to design a better hand-powered three-wheeled tricycle for use by persons with disabilities.)

EUROPE Czech Republic: Passenger lifts have been added at a transfer station for two metro lines in Prague. "The Prague Public Transit Company anticipates that by 2025 all of the public transport in Prague will be fully accessible," notes an update from UITP Europe. . . . Latvia: Twenty additional trams have been ordered to double Riga's low floor fleet (UITP).

AFRICA South Africa has issued draft operational guidelines for implementing transportation for students. . . . Africa's first locally manufactured accessible taxi began production in August, reports the Nissan Group of Africa (notice forwarded by Paul Ajuwon). . . . Kenya: More than 100,000 children with disabilities are out of school in Kenya, according to the Special Schools Heads Association of Kenya (Daily Nation, via GAATES). . . .

The Institute for Transportation Development & Policy (ITDP) has opened a new field office in Nairobi, a step which bodes well for future planning of bus rapid transit systems on the continent.

NORTH AMERICA USA: Easterseals has been awarded a grant to strengthen rural transport for seniors and persons with disabilities in seven northern states including Alaska. The focus will be on building coalitions of stakeholders to bring different groups together and better utilize the different transport services which are available. More information at www.easterseals.com. . . . AEI was active in recommending Mexico City, Kuala Lumpur, and San Francisco for case studies prepared for the Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, supporting the New Urban Agenda endorsed at the UN Habitat III forum held in October in Quito, Ecuador. . . . New York City has added 70 wheelchair-accessible vehicles to its paratransit fleet.

Whoops!

The intention was right when one city department attempted to make a walkway in Turkey more accessible. Another city department decided to put a utility box at the other end. Coordination is needed, noted Ad van Herk when he sent us the photos.



Want to learn more about school transport for persons with disabilities?

Consider attending "Transporting Students with Disabilities and Preschoolers," coming up on March 17-22, 2017, in Dallas/Frisco, Texas. This annual conference features sessions and workshops, hands-on training, and a trade show. For information and to register, go to stonline.com/tsd. International participants are welcomed. Photo: Pete Meslin and Janett Jiménez at last year's conference.

