

Transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency research report 690

Contracted research organisation – MRCagney

Summary of our research: disabled people's experiences of transport in Aotearoa New Zealand

This study will tell you about how disabled people get around in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2021. Disability is when the world doesn't work well for someone so they find it harder to live their life than other people do.

We studied different kinds of transport like walking, riding in a car, riding a bicycle, and using buses and trains. We included the system of cheaper taxis for disabled people, which is called Total Mobility. We wanted to find out what stops disabled people from using Total Mobility. We studied new types of transport that are coming out, which could make it easier for disabled people to move around.

We also asked people about parking. Some disabled people have a parking card called a Mobility Permit. It means they can use car parks that are only for disabled people. They have to display the card in their car.

To do the research we read a lot of other people's studies. We also did some surveys and workshops. More than 15,000 disabled people completed our surveys and more than 100 people came to our workshops. We did a survey of how people moved around during the Covid lockdown. For the lockdown survey we included answers from disabled and non-disabled people. We also surveyed people who work on transport, like engineers.

Review of other studies

The studies we read told us about how many different disabilities are in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how many people have them. It also told us about how every disabled person is different. Some groups of people are more likely to have a disability than

others. About one out of every four people in Aotearoa-New Zealand says they are disabled. Older people, Māori and Pacific peoples are most likely to be disabled.

Walking is the most common type of difficulty people have. Some people have more than one reason that transport is hard for them. For example, a disabled person who does not have much money probably has more transport problems than other people.

As another example, disabled women are more likely to be a victim of crime than other people. That makes disabled women less likely to want to wait around at a bus stop or to go out by themselves. So, there are a lot of reasons why transport is harder for disabled people than for others.

A report in 2003 called *The Accessible Journeys Inquiry* studied disabled people's experiences using buses and trains in New Zealand. It made lots of suggestions to make buses and trains easier to use for disabled people. We don't know whether that study did much good. Many of the problems written about in *The Accessible Journeys Inquiry* are still mentioned as problems in newer studies.

As we said earlier, we studied the Total Mobility system. Total Mobility gives disabled people a discount on taxi fares. Total Mobility was already studied in 2005. Some of the problems they found with it have not been fixed yet. These problems include the discount not being high enough. It is still too expensive for some disabled people to get a taxi even if they have a discount.

Also, some disabled people live in a place where there aren't any taxis. Some disabled people use a wheelchair and there are not enough taxis for wheelchairs. Total Mobility works differently in different parts of the country which makes it confusing for some people. A lot of people think it is unfair because it doesn't work the same for everyone.

A review of systems like Total Mobility from other countries did not find any major differences from how it runs in New Zealand. When we studied some new types of transport, we found some good things and some bad things. One example is self-driving cars. There might be self-driving cars in the future, but they are not here yet. So far there are not many good new options for disabled people to move around.

Surveys and workshops with disabled people

Our survey was written in a few different ways. We included New Zealand Sign Language which is how some Deaf people communicate. We included Easy Read

which is a survey made with lots of pictures and simple words so that lots of people can understand it. Altogether, 15,102 disabled people took part in our survey.

People who took part in the survey were asked to answer questions in two ways. The first way was by choosing an answer out of a list we gave them. The other way was by writing an answer from their head. We took what people wrote in the survey, what they said in some workshops we did and the answers they chose in the survey and put their answers together.

After looking at what people said, we realised that disabled people have a lot of problems with transport. Here are some of the things that we learned:

- People like having a taxi discount even if there are problems with it.
- Some people still don't have enough money to pay for a taxi even if they get a discount.
- Sometimes it is hard to find a taxi because there aren't enough of them.
- The rules for Total Mobility are different in different cities, which makes it confusing.
- A lot of disabled people stay home a lot of the time because it is too hard for them to go out.
- Some disabled people often have less money than other people, so that stops them using a car or a bus sometimes.
- There are a lot of problems with buses and trains that make them hard to use for disabled people. Some of the problems are when the driver or passengers aren't very friendly, or the bus doesn't show up at all.
- A lot of disabled people don't like going for a walk on busy footpaths because they are scared of being hit by someone on a scooter or bike.
- Some disabled people like using a car, because usually a car is easier than walking or getting a bus or a train.
- People who have the special parking card called a Mobility Permit like being able to use it because they can get a car park easier.
- Sometimes people who don't have a Mobility Permit take the parking spaces when they aren't supposed to, which is very annoying for disabled people.

- We need to teach everyone that often it's not obvious that someone is a disabled person. Not every disabled person uses a wheelchair or is blind. Sometimes people are unkind to disabled people. We need to stop that happening.
- Disabled people think that engineers who design new streets don't think about disabled people as much as they should.
- People who design new streets don't always know how hard it is to get around if the streets don't work well for disabled people. This needs to change.

Transport in lockdown: disabled and non-disabled people's views

Disabled people were much more likely than other people to stay home a lot during lockdown. They said that transport was hard for them. It was hard for lots of reasons.

One reason was that disabled people found it harder to stay away from other people. They couldn't easily get out of the way on a footpath. Some disabled people were very nervous about getting Covid so they stayed home more often. And some disabled people had problems using buses. They weren't sure where to sit and sometimes they needed a ramp but the ramps weren't working.

Transport providers' views on Total Mobility

We talked to people whose job it is to work on discounted taxis, which is called Total Mobility. The people who work on Total Mobility for their job said it could be better. Here are their suggestions to make Total Mobility better:

- Total Mobility would be better if the rules were the same in every city.
- There should be more advertising of Total Mobility so more people know about it.
- There should be more taxis giving people discounts.
- There should be more taxis that can take wheelchairs in them
- There should be more training for taxi drivers so that they are good drivers for disabled people.
- Total Mobility should give disabled people more of a discount so they can use it more often.

Conclusions

The problems disabled people have using transport in Aotearoa New Zealand have not changed in a long time. Disabled people feel like they have to complain a lot and it doesn't seem fair when they just want to be able to get around.

The problems are not easy to fix but they are serious. It is important that people who do transport for a job think more carefully about how to make it easier for disabled people. Here is what we think should happen to make transport easier for disabled people:

- All public transport should be better and easier for all people to use, including disabled people
- People who work on transport should actually check whether the streets they are in charge of are good streets for all disabled people to use.
- People who work on transport should ask disabled people where they go and where they don't go. Then the transport problems could be fixed in every town and city.
- Taxis should be even cheaper than they already are for disabled people.
- There should be more taxis and they should have more that can take wheelchairs.
- Everyone who works in transport should learn about disabled people and how to meet their needs.

We also think that people who study transport should ask disabled people questions more often. They should make the questions easy to understand so more people can answer them. Disabled people have a lot of problems in their lives so if we can make some of those problems go away, it would be much fairer.

The research report is on the internet here:

www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/690

