



Waka Kotahi research summary

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# Transport experiences of disabled people

How easily do disabled people access services and opportunities, and get around Aotearoa New Zealand?

This research explores the transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2021. The researchers asked:

- What barriers exist for people wanting to use the Total Mobility (subsidised taxi) scheme?
- What allows disabled people to walk, cycle and use public and private transport?
- What prevents them from using transport?
- What are new and emerging transport opportunities?

After reviewing the literature, the researchers:

- conducted surveys and workshops with disabled people about their transport experiences
- did surveys and workshops with transport providers about the Total Mobility scheme
- surveyed disabled and non-disabled New Zealanders about their transport experiences during COVID-19 lockdown.



### Literature review findings

About one-quarter of the Aotearoa New Zealand population identifies as disabled. Rates vary by age and ethnicity: older people, Māori, and Pacific peoples have the highest rates of disability. The most common impairment is difficulty walking.

### Issues compound, further reducing access

Many disabled people are also members of marginalised identities, which adds to their difficulties. For example:

- disabled Māori have far less access to transport to meet their cultural needs, and they're at greater risk of transport-based exclusion than other disabled people
- disabled women are 2-5 times more likely to experience hate crimes than non-disabled women and disabled men.

### Human Rights Commission inquiry

In 2003 the Human Rights Commission did an inquiry into accessible public land transport in New Zealand. While some of the recommendations in their report have been progressed, disabled people's access to the transport system hasn't measurably improved.

### Review of the Total Mobility scheme

The Total Mobility scheme provides subsidised taxi fares for disabled people who find it difficult to use public transport. A 2005 review of the scheme found:

- fares remain prohibitively expensive for many disabled people
- the service is only available where there are taxis, which leaves out disabled people in small towns and rural areas
- wheelchair-accessible taxis are limited, and their service is inconsistent.

Many of the issues identified in the 2005 review have still not been addressed.

## Emerging technologies

New technologies are giving people more transport options. For example, an app-based rideshare scheme may be an accessible, affordable option for disabled people. However, there is little evidence of such technologies improving disabled people's wellbeing through better transport choice.

## Surveys and workshops with disabled people

The researchers surveyed disabled people using several accessible formats, including New Zealand Sign Language and Easy Read. They gathered 15,102 responses. Results showed that:

- disabled people's experiences of transport vary widely
- there were commonly reported experiences, most of which were negative.

The researchers also conducted 11 workshops with disabled people, which confirmed the survey findings. They grouped the issues from the survey and workshops into 8 themes.

### 1. Total Mobility

- The scheme helps people to meet their needs independently.
- For some, a 50% subsidy made transport affordable.
- Available times and locations could be improved.
- Rideshare could be included.
- Inconsistency between regions makes the scheme difficult to use while travelling.
- Simple administrative fixes could make access easier.

### 2. Trips not made

- Multiple barriers prevent people from making trips.
- Commonly missed trips were for recreation, leisure and meeting daily needs.
- The most common reasons for not travelling were parking problems, accessibility of footpaths and public transport, and transport availability and affordability.

### 3. Challenges using buses

- A lack of available bus services (either not provided, not close enough or too inconvenient) was the most common challenge.
- Accessibility, and the attitudes of passengers and drivers, also prevent people from catching the bus.

### 4. Challenges using trains

- Trains tend to be more accessible than buses.
- A lack of train services was the most common reason people didn't catch the train.

### 5. Challenges related to walking, cycling and e-scooters

- Footpath and road crossing problems are the biggest barriers to people walking.
- Pedestrians feel vulnerable on shared paths with bikes and e-scooters.

### 6. Advantages and challenges of private cars

- Respondents appreciated that access to a private car gives them freedom.
- Other drivers' attitudes made disabled drivers and pedestrians feel unsafe.

### 7. Benefits and challenges of car parking

- Mobility parking permit holders benefit from greatly improved accessibility.
- Use of mobility parks without permits needs much stronger enforcement.
- People with invisible disabilities can be stigmatised. We need public education on why people legitimately use a parking permit.

### 8. Lack of inclusion in planning of sustainable cities and transport

- Disabled people fear being 'left behind' in planning for sustainable city centres.
- Disabled people could travel more sustainably if public transport and active transport modes (like walking and scootering) were more accessible.
- Transport planners often don't understand what it means to be disabled. This needs to change.

## Transport during lockdown: disabled and non-disabled people's views

Disabled people were much more likely than non-disabled people to report travel difficulties during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The biggest differences between the two groups' experiences were in accessing essential services, in accessing employment, and in trips not made due to difficulty accessing transport. During the survey period:

- 37% of disabled people had difficulty accessing essential services, compared with 10% of non-disabled people
- 18% of disabled people had difficulty accessing employment, compared with 5% of non-disabled people
- 29% of disabled people didn't make a trip due to transport difficulty in a given week of a nationwide lockdown, compared with 5% of non-disabled people.

## Transport providers' views on Total Mobility

Through surveys and workshops, Total Mobility transport providers suggested improving:

- consistency when delivering the scheme
- the scheme's profile, and therefore the numbers of providers (or finding other ways to do this)
- the grant amount for providers to buy wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

To improve quality, providers recommended:

- improving consistency of training across the country, and a more refined understanding of disability
- increasing clients' subsidies to make it more affordable.

## Conclusions

The challenges for disabled people using transport in Aotearoa New Zealand are still broad and complex. These problems are urgent because they affect the wellbeing of disabled people and their families daily, in serious ways. Here are some of the main issues that were raised by disabled people:

- Overall, there's no accountability or evaluation of investments to improve disabled people's journeys.
- Disabled people's travel takes longer and needs more effort, so many forgo trips that would otherwise support their wellbeing.
- Total Mobility helps some disabled people make some trips, but it also takes time and effort and is sometimes unreliable or unavailable.
- There is poor flow of information and feedback between the transport sector and disabled people and vice versa, limiting chances to improve transport accessibility.
- Inter-regional travel is often a challenge for disabled people.

The researchers recommend the transport sector be accountable for upholding the vision of accessible journeys for all. System interventions and four system pillars should support a whole-of-journey approach:

1. Conduct regular surveys specifically of disabled people's travel, to understand what causes the most difficulty, and work systematically to remove barriers.
2. Promote the voices of marginalised people to proactively address ableism.
3. Connect the inclusive access vision across government – into health, the social services sector and education, for example – to make transport accessible and inclusive.
4. Question and research the root causes of ableism to avoid introducing new barriers, and simplify transport to ensure more accessible journeys for everyone.

The researchers recommend improving Total Mobility with:

- consistent training and service delivery around Aotearoa New Zealand
- overhauling the scheme to make it more affordable, reliable, and accessible to more people, in more places.

## Recommendations for further research

The researchers also recommend that all research involving people's experiences of transport includes accessible research methods. This way, disabled people's needs are heard throughout the transport research sector, and not solely for research that is specifically about them.



RR 690: *Transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency research report. Available at [www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/690](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/690)