

# **Travel Instruction: Helping People Travel Independently around Massachusetts**

## **What is Travel Instruction and Why Does It Matter?**

Public transportation can help people move about their communities independently and get to work, medical appointments, social events, and other important activities on their own. However, some people do not know how to access the public transportation system. For example, a senior who has driven a car for most of her life may not know how to pay the fare or read a system map. A high school student with a disability may not know how to request his stop or what to do if he accidentally gets on the wrong bus. With some assistance, they may be able to learn how to ride the bus.

Travel instruction is the professional activity of teaching individuals how to use public transportation independently to access their environment and community. Across Massachusetts, individuals with disabilities and their families, seniors, human service agency staff, and transit authorities are experiencing a renewed interest in travel instruction.

## **Information in This Packet**

This packet contains introductory materials for people interested in travel instruction in Massachusetts. Are you wishing you had someone to help you learn how to ride the bus? Are you concerned about your loved one's safety on public transit? Do you want to start a travel instruction program at your school or agency, but aren't sure how to begin? This packet contains five tools that may help address your questions:

- An overview page with a brief explanation of travel instruction for all audiences
- Four FAQs:
  - FAQ for individuals and families considering whether travel instruction would be helpful for themselves or their loved ones
  - FAQ for families and educators of student-age youth with disabilities on incorporating travel instruction into the school curriculum
  - FAQ for human service agencies on how travel instruction can benefit the individuals they serve
  - FAQ for transit authorities on how travel instruction can benefit their customers and their bottom line

## **For More Information**

For more information on travel instruction in Massachusetts, you can visit [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction.html](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction.html). Good resources at the national level include the Association of Travel Instruction ([www.travelinstruction.org](http://www.travelinstruction.org)) and Easter Seals Project ACTION ([www.projectaction.org](http://www.projectaction.org)).

This packet was compiled by MassMobility, an initiative of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services' Human Service Transportation Office. Our goal is to increase mobility for seniors, people with disabilities, and others who cannot drive or do not have access to a car in Massachusetts by supporting efforts to expand and coordinate transportation options.

Visit us online at [www.mass.gov/hst](http://www.mass.gov/hst).

## What is Travel Instruction?

**Travel instruction** is the professional activity of teaching individuals how to use public transportation independently to access their environment and community.

Public transportation has a lot to offer individuals, families, and communities. It can help people get to key destinations like work, the doctor, or church – but only when people know how to use it. If you, your family member, or someone you work with does not know how to catch the bus, find a stop, or pay the fare, travel instruction can provide the missing link.

Travel instruction includes at least three different services:

- **Transit orientation** explains transportation systems by sharing information about trip planning, schedules, maps, fare systems, mobility devices, and benefits and services. It may be conducted in a group or one-on-one.
- **Familiarization** teaches people who are experienced with traveling about a new route or mode of transportation. It may be conducted in a group or one-on-one.
- **Travel training** is an intensive, one-on-one process to help someone gain the knowledge and skills he or she needs to make trips independently. Travel training is individualized to meet each person's unique needs.

Travel instruction is not the same as Orientation and Mobility training for people with visual impairments. Orientation and Mobility training includes travel instruction but also covers a number of other skills.

### Everybody wins from travel instruction

- **Individuals and their families** benefit from travel instruction because it facilitates independence and community living. It gives people more choice about how to get where they need to go.
- By offering travel instruction, **human service agencies** can help their consumers increase their mobility and their independence.
- **Transit authorities** benefit from travel instruction because it can help them increase ridership and save money. Riders may be able to shift some of their trips off of paratransit services on to fixed route services, reducing costs for transit agencies.

To learn more about how travel instruction works, how it is benefiting people and organizations around Massachusetts, and how you can get involved, check out our **FAQs** for individuals and families, families and educators of school-age youth with disabilities, human service agencies, and transit authorities.

## **Travel Instruction FAQ for Individuals and Families**

### **Why should I learn travel instruction?**

Travel instruction can increase your mobility, giving you more access to your community and to jobs – and increased independence.

For example:

- Two high school students who participated in travel instruction as part of the transition services they received in Great Barrington were able to get jobs after graduation. They now commute independently to those jobs by bus.
- Despite initial skepticism, a mother in the Worcester area signed herself up for travel instruction after seeing how much freedom her daughter enjoyed once she knew how to use the bus system. Her daughter learned how to ride public transportation in a travel instruction program that she enrolled in when she recertified herself for paratransit service.
- Seniors who are considering giving up driving can use travel instruction to learn how to continue their active lifestyles.

### **What will the program be like?**

Travel instruction varies depending on the program and depending on your needs.

- Some organizations offer travel instruction as part of other programming, such as employment services, while other organizations offer travel instruction on its own.
- Some travel instruction is provided in a group setting, while other programs are offered one-on-one. While transit orientation and familiarization may be one-time sessions delivered in a classroom setting, travel training is more intensive and individualized. In travel training, a staff member will ride with you on the bus or subway so that you can get comfortable with your trips before you try them alone.

### **I want to sign up for travel instruction. Where can I find it? How do I enroll?**

- A list of programs in Massachusetts is available online: [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction-programs-around-massachusetts.html](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction-programs-around-massachusetts.html).
- If you do not see a program in your area, call your local transit authority. Find out whether a transit authority covers your area and how to contact them here: [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/public-transportation-in-massachusetts.html](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/public-transportation-in-massachusetts.html).
- Reach out to human service agencies that you already have a relationship with or that serve your community and ask if they offer travel instruction or can recommend an organization that does.

## **Travel Instruction FAQ for Families and Educators of School-Age Youth with Disabilities**

### **Where can I find a travel instruction program?**

- Many schools offer travel instruction.
  - If your school offers travel instruction, specify “using transportation” as a learning goal in your student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP).
  - If your school does not offer travel instruction, you can advocate creation of a program at the school.
- While this FAQ focuses on school-based travel instruction, services outside of schools may also be available to your student. A list of programs in Massachusetts is available online: [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction-programs-around-massachusetts.html](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction-programs-around-massachusetts.html). If you do not see one for your area, contact your local transit authority to see if they offer travel instruction services to the public. To find your local transit authority, look up your town here: [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/public-transportation-in-massachusetts.html](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/public-transportation-in-massachusetts.html). Or, human service organizations in your area may offer travel instruction.
- As you research options, make sure that the travel instruction services are offered by qualified professionals. Easter Seals Project ACTION has guidance on hiring: [tinyurl.com/ESPA-hiringTT](http://tinyurl.com/ESPA-hiringTT).

### **Where should travel instruction be included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)?**

- Include travel instruction as it relates to a student’s IEP goals. In many cases, travel instruction is included in IEP discussions around transition planning and preparing students for success after leaving school.

### **When is the best age to start travel instruction?**

- The age to start varies by individual and by school system. Our recommendation is to start early to give students time to get familiar with transit. Don’t wait until they are approaching age 22 and about to age out of the system.
- Starting as early as elementary school, schools can offer a comprehensive transportation education program. For example, teachers can use transportation route maps and schedules as learning tools in a map skills, reading, or math class.

### **Wouldn’t it be easier for my student to get paratransit service instead of travel instruction?**

- The ability to ride public transit in addition to or instead of paratransit increases students’ independence, choices, and mobility. For example, paratransit rides generally must be arranged days in advance. Public transit provides riders with the ability to participate spontaneously in many activities.

### **Is travel instruction safe? Is using public transportation safe?**

- Ask your travel trainer about his or her experience, training, and safety precautions. Share any individual concerns you have about your particular student.
- In general, the teacher or travel trainer stays with the student all the time when instruction begins. As the student gains skills, the trainer begins to step back. At first, the trainer may sit in the back of the bus while the student rides in the front. Once the student is demonstrating key competencies, the trainer shadows the student, perhaps following the bus in a car.
- Travel training also includes learning and practicing what to do when something goes wrong or something unexpected happens. Often travel instruction programs include “safety tips and guides” for all passengers. Only after the student has mastered these lessons will the student be allowed to travel independently.
- One way for families and educators to feel more comfortable about public transportation is to use it themselves.

### **How do we pay for the trips that students take as part of their travel instruction sessions?**

- Some transit agencies will provide free passes for students who are enrolled in travel instruction. Contact your local transportation provider to find out if a free or reduced fare program exists or if they would be open to developing one.
- Check with your pupil transportation (school bus) department to see if they have a relationship with your local transit. In some school districts, pupil transportation departments have partnered with transit to establish cost-sharing programs in which the school district and public transit agency split the cost of student use of public transit.
- Schools can pay for fares out of general funding or by raising funds through fundraisers or grants.

### **Where can I find more information?**

- Easter Seals Project ACTION:
  - [www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/TravelTraining.aspx](http://www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/TravelTraining.aspx)
  - Teachers and school administrators can find helpful resources here: [www.projectaction.org/Training/TravelTraining/TravelTrainingforStudentSuccess.aspx](http://www.projectaction.org/Training/TravelTraining/TravelTrainingforStudentSuccess.aspx)
  - Connect with other families, students, educators, and transit professionals in the Accessible Transportation for Students Online Community: [espancst.communityzero.com/ats](http://espancst.communityzero.com/ats)
- Association of Travel Instruction: [www.travelinstruction.org](http://www.travelinstruction.org)
- Massachusetts resources: [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction.html](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction.html)

## **Travel Instruction FAQ for Human Service Agencies**

### **Why should my agency or organization offer travel instruction?**

By offering travel instruction, your human service agency or community-based organization can:

- Help your consumers increase their mobility and independence
- Increase the community's knowledge around transportation services and mobility options
- Build relationships with new partners, such as transit providers, educators, and other human service agencies.

For example, a statewide non-profit serving people with disabilities embeds travel instruction into its employment support programming to ensure that people will be able to get to their jobs once they find employment.

### **What will it cost for my agency to offer travel instruction?**

Costs vary widely depending on the type of travel instruction offered. Cost considerations may include:

- Scope of program including numbers of riders served, duration of service, type of service
- Staffing
- Program administrative costs including insurance, overhead, liability, etc.

### **How can I fund my program?**

- Travel instruction may be an eligible expense under a grant you already have or a program you are already offering.
- Some agencies use general operating funds to support travel instruction.
- Apply for grants to cover travel instruction. Look for grants to support community living, inclusion, and student transition planning, as well as transportation.

### **Can I contract with another agency to offer travel instruction?**

- Yes. While some organizations offer travel instruction in-house, others prefer to partner with their regional transit authority or contract with another organization.

## **What will my agency need in order to launch a successful travel instruction program?**

- Skilled staff that has undergone training.
  - Staff should demonstrate a range of competencies, including but not limited to knowledge of disabilities, knowledge of the transit system, knowledge of travel skills and techniques, knowledge of safety, and competency in delivering this information in a field setting.
  - Easter Seals Project ACTION has published a document on competencies for travel instruction: [www.tinyurl.com/espa-TTcompetencies](http://www.tinyurl.com/espa-TTcompetencies).
- Curriculum
  - Adapt existing curricula to align with your own target population and environment.
  - Reach out to existing programs and ask if you can see their forms and curriculum or shadow a travel trainer. A list of programs in Massachusetts is available online: [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction-programs-around-massachusetts.html](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction-programs-around-massachusetts.html).
  - Individuals who sign up for Easter Seals Project ACTION's Introduction to Travel Training course will receive a cd-rom including sample curricula: [www.projectaction.org/Training/TravelTraining/IntroductiontoTravelTraining.aspx](http://www.projectaction.org/Training/TravelTraining/IntroductiontoTravelTraining.aspx).
- Program administration capacity, including funding for the program, a communications and marketing system.
- Evaluation system that monitors the performance of the travel trainers and rider outcomes. Collects feedback from individuals who have gone through training and from their family members, as appropriate.
- Relationship with your local transit authority.

## **Where can I go to learn more?**

- Easter Seals Project ACTION: [www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/TravelTraining.aspx](http://www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/TravelTraining.aspx)
- Association of Travel Instruction: [www.travelinstruction.org](http://www.travelinstruction.org)
- Massachusetts resources: [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction.html](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/commissions-and-initiatives/hst/travel-instruction.html)

## **What resources support travel instruction in Massachusetts?**

The Massachusetts travel instruction network is an informal group of travel trainers, travel instruction program leaders, and anyone considering establishing a travel instruction program in Massachusetts. The network has an email discussion group and also holds in-person meetings. Participants use the network to share information and best practices, brainstorm solutions to challenges, and learn about resources around the state. To learn more or join, please contact us at [hstmobility@state.ma.us](mailto:hstmobility@state.ma.us).

## **Travel Instruction FAQ for Transit Authorities**

### **Why should my transit authority offer travel instruction?**

By offering travel instruction, transit authorities may be able to:

- Increase ridership
- Reduce expenses by shifting some paratransit trips to fixed route service
- Build relationships with local human service agencies and educators
- Increase public support for the role public transportation can play in mobility, access, and community life

For example, one Regional Transit Authority in Massachusetts was able to save over \$330 per week by providing travel instruction to one customer for her work trips. While she still uses paratransit for other trips, she can use the fixed route system for her commute to and from work – totaling ten trips per week.

### **What will it cost for my agency to offer travel instruction?**

Costs vary widely depending on the type of travel instruction offered. Cost considerations may include:

- Scope of program including numbers of riders served, duration of service, type of service
- Staffing
- Program administrative costs including insurance, overhead, liability, etc.

### **How can I fund my program?**

- Use general operating funds. Some agencies find that travel instruction programs pay for themselves through the money saved by helping riders shift some of their trips from paratransit to fixed route service.
- Apply for grant funding, such as funding from the MassDOT Community Transit Grant Program:  
[www.massdot.state.ma.us/transit/CommunityTransitGrantProgram.aspx](http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/transit/CommunityTransitGrantProgram.aspx).

### **Can I contract with another agency to offer travel instruction?**

- Yes. While some transit authorities offer travel instruction in-house, others prefer to contract with organizations such as human service agencies or community transportation non-profits.



## **What will my agency need in order to launch a successful travel instruction program?**

- Skilled staff that has undergone training.
  - Staff should demonstrate a range of competencies, including but not limited to knowledge of disabilities, knowledge of the transit system, knowledge of travel skills and techniques, knowledge of safety, and competency in delivering this information in a field setting.
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- Program administration capacity, including funding for the program, a communications and marketing system, and an evaluation system.
- Relationships with human service agencies or community-based organizations that have expertise in working with – and connections to – the communities and groups you are targeting for travel instruction.

## **Where can I go to learn more?**

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