

# **A Lift to Freedom. The Bus Every One Can Ride**

**Submitted by**

**Mass Transit Administration  
Maryland Department of Transportation  
300 W. Lexington Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201-3415  
(410) 333-2059 (Voice)  
(410) 333-4347 (TDD)**

**For**

**Project ACTION  
of Easter Seals  
700 Thirteenth Street, NW  
Suite 2003  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 347-3066 or 1-800-659-6428 Voice/TTY)  
project\_action@easter-sealsdc.org (E-Mail)**

**Doc. No: 95-0030**

This material was produced with assistance derived from Project ACTION of Easter Seals, through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration.

**This document is disseminated under sponsorship of Project ACTION of Easter Seals in the interest of information exchange. Neither Project ACTION, Easter Seals, nor the Federal Transit Administration assumes liability for its contents or use thereof. The contents of this report reflect the opinion of the author.**

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction.....   | 1  |
| Statement of Need.....                                    | 1  |
| Primary Goal Statement .....                              | 1  |
| Target Population.....                                    | 2  |
| Description of Cooperating Organizations.....             | 2  |
| Description of Transportation System.....                 | 4  |
| Statement of the Problem.....                             | 7  |
| History of the Problem.....                               | 7  |
| Description of Current State of the Problem .....         | 7  |
| Project Goals and Objectives .....                        | 8  |
| Description of Solution.....                              | 10 |
| Sensitivity Training .....                                | 12 |
| Orientation and Mobility Training .....                   | 14 |
| Disability Transportation Accessibility Guide.....        | 16 |
| Community Outreach.....                                   | 17 |
| Chart 2 - Demonstrations and Presentations.....           | 18 |
| Chart 2 - Demonstrations and Presentations Continued..... | 20 |
| Evaluation .....  | 25 |
| Formal Evaluation Activities.....                         | 25 |
| Informal Evaluation Activities.....                       | 27 |
| Summary.....  | 29 |

## **Introduction**

### **Statement of Need**

The quality of service delivery by the Mass Transit Administration (MTA) to passengers who are blind or visually impaired has been addressed in a variety of practices since the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). In formulating the agency's paratransit plan, specific consideration was not given to this disability group, and this became a concern of the "A Lift to Freedom" project near the end of its initial phase. The MTA is committed to complying with both the letter and the spirit of the ADA and to include in its service to individuals with disabilities a wide variety of disability groups.

### **Primary Goal Statement**

The primary goal of this project has been to improve and enhance the travel options of individuals who are blind or visually impaired in their use of mainline public transportation, including the bus, and rail systems. An analysis of the statistics of ridership by individuals with disabilities indicated that relatively few individuals use the heavy rail system. The MTA's light rail was opened for revenue service in April 1992 and statistics for this system are difficult to capture as it is self-service and does not involve passenger interaction with MTA personnel. The exception is in the use of the boarding ramp on the high blocks, and observation has shown that most individuals who are blind or visually impaired do not use this method of boarding the train. However, because of its relatively short service period, it is a safe assumption that few if any individuals who are blind or visually impaired have been trained on its use, or in fact actually use it. Therefore, a strategy for specific outreach to this group was designed and implemented and covers both the bus and the two rail systems.

## Target Population

This project included three specific activities which, when executed together, provide enhanced services to passengers who are blind or visually impaired. One major activity was orientation and mobility training for individuals in this disability group. Each of the consumers who received training had to be a current user of public transportation, be over the age of eighteen, and have at least five years of independent traveling experience. Most of the individuals served in this group are completely blind and a few were included who are legally blind or whose vision is so poor that they qualify for reduced fare by this agency. It has also been determined that other groups of passengers will receive benefits from another major activity during this period. This activity is designed to enhance bus operators' routine announcement of transfer points, points of interest, and specific requests by passengers. These additional groups include other language speakers, individuals who are cognitively impaired, persons who have Teaming disabilities such as dyslexia, newcomers to the area, and individuals who have limited reading skills.

## Description of Cooperating Organizations

The following agencies worked in collaboration with the "A Lift to Freedom" toward the attainment of the projects goals and objectives:

**Maryland Center For Independent Living** -- This private agency is the subcontractor for the project. The agency's goal is to assist its clients in becoming independent in all aspects of their lives, including traveling and using public transportation. The agency is part of a network of similar agencies throughout the nation and has worked in collaboration with the MTA on several previous projects. This agency has a staff of eleven (11) full-time employees, most of whom are independent living specialists.

**Blind Industries and Services of Maryland** -- This private agency provides a full range of services to individuals who are blind or who are visually impaired, including orientation and mobility training, job training, and employment. This agency has an administrative staff of approximately twenty-one (21), including rehabilitation, orientation and mobility specialists. Additionally, the agency serves as a sheltered workshop employer of about 150 individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

**Maryland School for the Blind** -- This residential public school for students who are blind or visually impaired has been in operation for over a hundred years and serves the entire state. Students are taught primary orientation and mobility training by certified, professional instructors. The staff, including administrative, professional, and support personnel, exceeds one hundred.

**Division of Rehabilitative Services** -- This state agency (formerly Division of Vocational Rehabilitation) is charged with testing, training, and placing a wide variety of persons, including individuals with disabilities. There is a specialized unit within the agency which serves individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The exact number of staff members this agency employs throughout the state exceeds fifteen hundred persons.

**Technology Assistance Program-Maryland Rehabilitation Center** -- This state agency is the repository of assistive technology for individuals with disabilities. The center conducts a full range of training sessions for individuals and groups in the use of assistive devices. The center also produces documents in Braille for other state agencies, organizations and individuals. The center employs about nine (9) persons, most of whom are involved in technology service delivery and training of individuals with disabilities.

**Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped** -- This state agency provides a wide range of library services throughout the state and is located in the central business district of Baltimore. Because of its close proximity to the MTA headquarters and its central location, it has agreed to become a repository of the route guides that are being generated by this project. The Library has a staff of about fifteen (15) persons, including persons with disabilities.

**Maryland New Directions, Inc.** -- This private agency receives funding from the United Fund and the State Department of Social Services. One of its major activities is providing training and placement for individuals who are unemployed or underemployed. Its project efforts of placing teenage parents in part-time work sites have forged a collaborative effort between the public school system and the business community. The agency has a professional staff of twenty-three (23).

## **Description of Transportation System**

The Mass Transit Administration (MTA) is a modal agency of the Maryland Department of Transportation (see Chart 1), and is responsible for providing public transit services in the Baltimore metropolitan region and administers public transit programs throughout the state. Operations include an integrated system of buses, a heavy rail system, a light rail system, a commuter rail system and a paratransit service for individuals with disabilities. The bus system also provides express connections between the central business district and major employment sites and park-and-ride facilities located in the surrounding counties. Across the state, the MTA administers programs including capital and operating assistance to smaller transit systems, carpool and vanpool marketing and matching, and the distribution of capital and operating aid to improve services to senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

The MTA operates approximately 900 buses on approximately 68 routes in the City and in Baltimore, Anne Arundel Harford, and Howard Counties. More than 83,000,000 passenger trips were made in 1992, accounting for an average weekday ridership for buses of 290,000 and 45,000 on the heavy rail system. The heavy rail system, the Metro, operates from die central business district to Owings Mills in northern Baltimore County; current expansions will extend the line to Johns Hopkins Hospital in East Baltimore. The light rail system began revenue service in May 1992 and currently has a daily ridership of approximately 8,000. In 1990 the MTA began purchasing 100% lift-equipped vehicles and currently has 340, representing approximately 35% of the entire fleet- Each accessible coach is equipped with a Lift-U system located at the front door entrance and two forward-facing securement positions for wheelchairs. Wheelchair restraint systems are comprised of a wheel clamp, lap belt, and two wheel straps. The fifty (50) coaches purchased in 1992 are equipped with Q-Straints in compliance with the ADA. These coaches are also equipped with visual indications that a stop request has been made by a passenger. Since 1988, all coaches have been equipped with internal and external public address systems. To maximize the availability of accessible vehicles, the MTA has been operating the Call-A-Lift program since 1985. Through this program the MTA provides lift buses on any routes that do not have scheduled accessible buses. This service may be requested for any time of the day, seven days a week, as long as the MTA has a bus scheduled for that time. Reservations for this program are made by calling a special number (MTA-Lift) by 4:00 p.m. prior to the day of travel. Passengers making the same trip every day or every week may request a standing order- Weekday standing orders are not honored on days that the MTA observes a holiday schedule.

The heavy rail system is comprised of twelve (12) stations and is fully accessible to persons with disabilities. Elevators and escalators at station

entrances take passengers to the mezzanine and platform levels.

Accessible entrances and exits are designated by the international symbol of accessibility. Special parking for persons displaying handicapped parking permits have been reserved at all stations that have parking. Raised lettering is used on elevator buttons to assist persons with visual impairments. A soft-tone buzzer, sounding when train doors open and close, indicates the location of the doors for persons who are blind or visually impaired. Each station is equipped with a public address system to provide audible information. Each station has at least one attendant at all times during station operating hours; assistance from these attendants is available upon request. The Metro has a fleet of 100 rail vehicles that are 76 feet long with a total passenger capacity of 100. Space is provided near the doors of each car for passengers who use wheelchairs; securement devices are not provided. On the platform, there is a maximum vertical distance of 1 1/2" from the rail car. Presently, 24" tactile edges are being installed on platforms of each station; estimated completion date is January 1995. Construction for the light rail system began after the passage of the ADA and, consequently, it is in compliance with the provisions of the ADA. The light rail stops consist of low platforms, high blocks with boarding ramps, ticket vending machines, and simple shelters with wind screens and benches - Free parking, including spaces for individuals with disabilities, is provided at ten (10) of the stops. Boarding access for passengers with disabilities is provided at the front of the first forward vehicle (trains may be 1-3 cars long). Manually operated bridge gates are located at the front doors to cover the gap between the high block platform and the floor of the vehicle. These bridges can only be accessed by the train operator. Tactile edges are being installed on each of the high blocks with an estimated completion date of January 1995. All vehicles are accessible to customers with disabilities, including four wheelchair securements on each car near the front and rear entrances of each car. Stop request and intercom buttons are located throughout the cars, as well as in close proximity

to the securement areas. The intercom allows the passenger to contact the operator throughout the trip.

## **Statement of the Problem**

### **History of the Problem**

Prior to the passage of the ADA the relationship between the MTA and the disability community had been chaotic and deeply rooted in conflict. Following a 1981 suit, the MTA began purchasing lift-equipped buses in 1983, leading to the current configuration of accessible coaches. The initial "A Lift to Freedom" project brought considerable attention to the need to market @ services in the community and the response was overwhelming. The concerns of certain categories of passengers with disabilities continued to be problematic for the MTA even after the final phase of the initial project as it was designed to primarily address those consumers with mobility impairments. Consequently, the name connotes the physical lifting of a wheelchair or passenger onto a bus. However, throughout the program, it was evident that a distinct group of passengers with disabilities have different transportation needs that will require customized services. This groups includes individuals who are blind or visually impaired-

### **Description of Current State of the Problem**

While passengers who are blind do not usually require the use of a lift-equipped coach or special boarding ramp on the train, their transportation concerns include unfamiliarity with routes, streets, and landmarks. Additionally, the insensitivity of operators in announcing transfer points and points of interest made it difficult for such passengers to determine their precise locations at all times during a given trip, This situation also undermines one's sense of personal safety as well as orientation to the immediate environment-

The MTA is in the process of recertifying its passengers who use its paratransit service (Mobility) using the guidelines from the ADA. At the onset of this project, it was estimated that approximately sixty percent (60%) of the current Mobility registrants would not qualify for complementary paratransit. The target population for this project was to have been selected from this group of consumers. However, the agency received an extension in certifying users for the complementary paratransit service. Therefore, it was necessary to generate a different method of determining the individuals who would comprise this population. Consumers who are blind or who have low vision were recruited from agencies and organizations that serve this population, and from 2- and 4-year colleges. A survey instrument (see Appendix) was developed and administered to consumers in this focus group regarding their travel patterns. The findings of this survey indicated that an extremely small percentage of these individuals use the heavy or light rail systems. Their comments as to why they do not use these systems were generally that they were unfamiliar with the layout of the stations, how to use the fare vending machines, and their fear of being on the platforms when trains approach. Therefore, the focus of the orientation and mobility training became centered on these issues and how to ameliorate them for consumers.

## Project Goals and Objectives

- Goal 1:** To facilitate bus operators' routine announcement of transfer points, points of interest, and specific requests from consumers.
- Objective 1 -** Survey each bus route to ascertain relevant data.
- Objective 2 -** Develop and distribute to operations personnel a detailed listing for each bus route which includes listed data.

**Goal 2:** To continue attitudinal, awareness, and interactive sensitivity training program for transit personnel

**Objective 1 -** Conduct disability sensitivity training sessions.

**Objective 2 -** Administer evaluation forms to participants

**Goal 3:** To successfully transition 100 consumers who are blind or visually impaired into using the heavy and/or light rail systems.

**Objective 1 -** Develop and implement and outreach campaign to consumers.

**Objective 2 -** Develop and implement specific training.

**Goal 4:** To prepare a transit accessibility guide for the bus and heavy and light rail systems.

**Objective 1 -** Garner input from consumers and disability professionals.

**Objective 2 -** Develop and distribute user guide to consumers.

**Goal 5:** To continue community-based demonstrations and presentations to individuals with disabilities.

**Objective 1 -** Continue presence in community to enhance lift ridership.

**Objective 2 -** To enhance the use of public transportation by consumers who are blind or visually impaired.

**Objective 3 -** Distribute MTA publications relative to services to the disability community

## Description of Solution

The initial activities of this project included an overview of all MTA systems to determine if disparities in service delivery to passengers who are blind or visually impaired were present. These activities included an in-depth survey of both the heavy and light rail systems. The latter system was inaugurated at the very end of the previous contract period and there was no evaluation of its accessibility for individuals who are blind/visually impaired prior to the final report for the contract. Additionally, in-house statistics indicated that a very small percentage of travelers who are blind/visually impaired were using the heavy rail system even though it has been in operation for several years. During this period, a near-fatal incident occurred at one on the heavy rail stations. This incident led to the preparation of a position paper (see Appendix) by the "A Lift to Freedom" staff which was presented to the MTA Administrator, Each of the activities outlined above will be discussed in detail.

Project STOP -- The genesis of this activity began early in the project year when a method was envisioned of facilitating bus operators in routinely announcing transfer points. This had been and continued to be of grave concern for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. However, during the information gathering phase of the project, it was discovered that such announcements would also be beneficial for numerous groups, such as other language speakers, people who have limited reading skills, newcomers to the area, persons who are cognitively impaired, and people who have teaming disabilities such as dyslexia.

This concern about the bus operators' failure to routinely announce transfer points and points of interest led the project to conduct an informal survey (Project STOP; see form in Appendix). This was accomplished by using the project coordinators, members of the Consumer Advisory Council for Accessible Transportation (CACAT), and the special consultant. The purpose of

this activity was to collect data on specific bus lines relative to the announcement of transfer points. As a result of this project, it was determined that a method of facilitating this requirement of the ADA was necessary. Consequently, the "A Lift to Freedom" staff conducted specific route surveys and prepared route sheets for each bus line which will show all transfer points and many points of interest (see Appendix).

The initial set of these forms were pilot tested with one bus division to determine if they were tenable, easy to use, and appropriate. The immediate response from bus operators, supervisors, and the superintendent was quite positive and each expressed a need for such a tool to be provided for operators on all routes. Following considerable refinement and re-tooling, the following types of interest points were included on all forms: hospitals and rehabilitation centers, 2- and 4-year colleges, major employers, major tourist attractions, major sports sites, and many municipal, state, and federal establishments. Transfer points include all bus routes, and all heavy, light, and commuter rail connections.

As a result of this activity, all bus routes (with the exception of express lines) were surveyed in detail. Much of the needed information regarding transfer points existed in a wide variety of documents which the MTA provided (e.g., pocket timetables for consumers, system ride guide, Transit Route Profiles . However, a comprehensive survey of transfer points along with points of interest had never been compiled by the agency for use by operators. Therefore, it was very important to present information that would be easy for operators to follow and which would provide a valuable and useful service to this specific focus group as well as to the general riding public, A balance had to be reached in which the information was complete and yet did not overwhelm operators to the point that it became counterproductive.

The metropolitan area which the MTA serves is quite large and diverse, including the, central business district of Baltimore, numerous city neighborhoods and commercial areas, and suburban and rural areas of several counties. The major technique used in completing this activity was to conduct an on-site survey of each route, study maps which show points of interest, and verify the data with a variety of agency personnel for accuracy, completion, and relevance. This process is replicable in other areas that are served by public transportation agencies regardless of the size and complexity of the service area.

Product list:

- a Survey sheet
- STOP Manual for Mass Transit Administration

## **Sensitivity Training**

This training for the "A Lift to Freedom" project was conducted by the Maryland Center for Independent Living (MCIL). These training sessions were a continuation of those that were conducted in the previous funding cycle to MTA bus operators and supervisors. MCIL was initially contracted to conduct four (4) sessions during this funding cycle- The objective of these sessions was to enable MTA employees to understand the issues that impact on consumers with disabilities in using public transportation. In addition, the goal was to provide relevancy of these issues to various departments within the MTA. Last year because of the homogeneous nature of the groups, it was common to have thirty-five to fifty people in attendance at each session. However, this year target areas for sensitivity training included employees from a variety of departments among the support staff.

The announcement of the four disability training sessions as well as the scheduling of those who wished to attend were coordinated through the "A Lift

to Freedom" office. Each of the four disability sensitivity training sessions were scheduled to be 2 1/2 hours long. Those in attendance included MCIL Executive Director, Frank Pinter, who was the facilitator, a panel of three or four individuals with disabilities, and fifteen or more employees from various departments. Because of the overwhelming response from those who wished to attend, MCIL agreed to conduct two additional sessions; however, one had to be canceled because of conflicts in scheduling.

Many of the departments of the MTA were only able to have a few employees at a time attend any one session. Therefore, it was decided to have smaller groups of no more than fifteen (15) or twenty (20) participants. This would help in responding directly to the diversity of the department representatives at these sessions.

Prior to each session, a list of the participants and their respective departments were given to Frank Pinter (see Appendix). With this information, he was able to select specific topics which would be relevant to such employees in their working environments. During the months of May and June, the four sessions were scheduled. Frequently, these sessions were overbooked to accommodate anticipated last-minute cancellations. However, most of the cancellations were rescheduled for a later session. It was not uncommon to have five or more different departments represented at a given session.

The small group aspect of these sessions enhanced the interaction between transit consumers and the MTA employees. The whole group was seated in a circle with transit consumers and the facilitator strategically located throughout the circle. Each session opened with the facilitator giving an overview of the objectives of the training and presenting some misconceptions commonly noted about individuals with disabilities. Other misconceptions were interjected throughout the sessions as they were relevant. During the session,,;

transit consumers with disabilities were given a maximum of five minutes to present issues and concerns in using public transportation of the disability groups which they represent. The panel of transit consumers included a person who is blind, a person who uses a wheelchair, and a person with a hidden disability.

The session continued with a brief introduction from each of the participants who often shared their experiences with individuals with disabilities. As intended, the presentation by consumers and the experiences by MTA employees within the group served as the catalyst for many informative discussions. This activity was followed by specifically targeting certain departments and how they relate to transit consumers with disabilities. Some common topics which were covered included how to offer assistance, provide information, acknowledge complaints, and develop new procedures concerning persons with disabilities,

This type of training session can be replicated with public transportation entities in other areas with very little adjustment. The determination for the modification will only depend upon the commonality or the diversity of the groups. It is recommended that public transit agencies consider conducting this type of training with their employees, making sure that individuals with disabilities are included.

Product List:

- Departments represented in training sessions
- Evaluation form
- Handouts for participants

## **Orientation and Mobility Training**

The Maryland Center for Independent Living, the subcontractor for this project, coordinated the activities involved in this endeavor. It was import for the MTA not to have been affiliated with conducting travel training for consumers. Such an affiliation could have inaccurately fostered the idea that the MTA would be responsible for providing such training for a wide variety of individuals with disabilities, Therefore, all contact which consumers had was through Frank Pinter of MCIL and his designated representative. Additionally, all instructors were certified and selected on the basis of their credentials by the MCIL director.

A meeting of interested Professionals in this area was convened by MCIL to define the target population who would participate in this activity. Major factors that contributed to this decision were travel experience of consumers, limitations of training including time and cost, and liability issues. As a result, a process was put into place where each client would be screened prior to speaking with an orientation and mobility instructor. Each consumer has to be a current user of public transportation and have at least five years of independent traveling experience, It was agreed that this barometer would somewhat insure that the consumer has developed and is currently using his/her travel schedules, which would shorten the training time considerably. Specific goals in each case would be outlined to measure the success of each training session. For example, some individuals wanted to learn how to determine in which direction a heavy rail train is approaching. Others were interested in learning how to locate the high block in boarding the light rail system. Still others wanted to learn what to anticipate at exits and entrances of the other systems. There were also those who wanted to learn how to navigate the entire light or heavy rail system. Consumers were guaranteed no more than five hours of training at no cost. It was agreed that the experienced traveler would take considerably less time to train. Also to maximize the training time as well as to reduce the risk of liability, each consumer was asked to meet the instructor at the training site.

Following the completion of the training, each consumer was told that he/she would be contacted to complete a post-training evaluation by the "A Lift to Freedom" staff. The objective was to measure the success of the training as compared with the stated goals of the project. Additionally, each orientation and mobility instructor was required to complete an evaluation of each individual whom he/she had trained.

It is important to note that individuals who receive orientation to a specific mode of transportation must continue to use the techniques that they have acquired in order to master them. It was the objective of this project to provide consumers who are blind or visually impaired with some of the techniques and skills to enhance their ability to use alternative means of public transportation more effectively. The success of this activity will only be reflected through an increased number of these consumers on the light and heavy systems.

Product List:

- Orientation and Mobility Training Checklist
- Instructor Evaluation Form
- Consumer Evaluation Form

## **Disability Transportation Accessibility Guide**

The MTA distributes a wide variety of consumer publications. Most of these publications include some information about the system that is relevant for individuals with disabilities. However, there has been no single publication exclusively geared toward the disability community that includes information they specifically need. Therefore, it was determined that such information should be organized in one publication and distributed throughout the disability community.

In the conception and development stage of producing this document, consideration was given to format, print size, and content. While the permissible font size for large print is 14 point, it was found that this precluded the inclusion of much relevant information because of space. Additionally, the ultimate physical size of the document could not exceed certain parameters for fear that a large, folded document would be difficult for some people with limited mobility to use. Therefore, the final size is 17X14 folded into four quadrants. There is one small area that includes points of interest and corresponding bus routes that is printed using a 10-point font. We felt that including this information was important and that consumers who have vision difficulty will be able to benefit from the large-print edition of the guide.

This deliverable will be easy to duplicate at any transit agency. It is important to get input from members of the disability community as to the content and format of such a guide. Many consumers stated that such a guide was long overdue and asked for more information to be included. However, because of the reasons cited above, the amount of data included had to be curtailed. The large-print version of the guide must be in type that exceeds 14 point and will likely have to be in a different format.

Product List:

- Disability Transportation Guide (Print, Large Print, Braille)

## **Community Outreach**

During the previous project year for the "A Lift to Freedom" program a solid record of community outreach was established by the staff. While this was not the focus of the current -rant, it was determined that this activity had to be continued to bring continuity and cohesion to the entire project. Therefore, this

activity was continued and expanded by including sites and groups which cater to the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

The chart below provides the number and types of community demonstrations and presentations that were conducted. These activities reached a wide variety of individuals with disabilities.

**Chart 2 - Demonstrations and Presentations**

| Date     | Location                        | Number |
|----------|---------------------------------|--------|
| 09-07-92 | WMAR Channel 2                  | 9      |
| 10-07-92 | 1 Avondale Apartments           | 14     |
| 10-10-92 | Amputee Association of Maryland | 37     |
| 10-14-92 | Rosemont Towers Apartments      | 25     |
| 10-15-92 | MeMechen School                 | 65     |
| 10-16-92 | St. Elizabeth's School          | 32     |
| 10-21-92 | Opportunity Builders            | 26     |
| 10-23-92 | Commission on Disabilities      | 150    |
| 11-10-92 | The Joseph Center               | 23     |
| 12-07-92 | Montebello Rehabilitation Hosp. | 11     |
| 02-23-93 | Blind Industries and Services   | 9      |
| 03-02-93 | Eastwood Center                 | 12     |
| 03-12-93 | Montebello Rehabilitation Hosp. | 14     |
| 03-28-93 | Multiple Sclerosis Super Cities | 300    |
| 04-07-93 | Alliance, Inc.                  | 8      |
| 04-23-93 | Maryland Rehabilitation Center  | 21     |
| 04-27-93 | Technology Assistance Program   | 3      |
| 05-04-93 | Maryland Rehabilitation Center  | 7      |

|          |                                 |    |
|----------|---------------------------------|----|
| 05-08-93 | Maryland Head Injury Foundation | 53 |
| 05-13-93 | MCIL                            | 13 |
| 05-20-93 | Technology Assistance Program   | 16 |
| 05-26-93 | Maryland School for the Blind   | 8  |
| 06-08-93 | MCIL                            | 14 |

**Chart 2 - Demonstrations and Presentations Continued**

| Date     | Location                      | Number |
|----------|-------------------------------|--------|
| 06-11-13 | Maryland School for the Blind | 227    |
| 06-19-93 | Role Models Picnic            | 210    |
| 06-19-93 | Nat'l Federation of the Blind | 113    |
| 07-01-93 | Crossroads 1                  | 26     |
| 07-01-93 | Crossroads III                | 41     |
| 07-17-93 | American Council of the Blind | 56     |
| 07-19-93 | independence Festival 1       | 88     |
| 07-18-93 | Independence Festival II      | 36     |
| 07-28-93 | Information Fair - MSB        | 120    |
|          | Total                         |        |

**Discussion of Outcomes**

Goal 1 -- The major outcome Of this activity was the production of a comprehensive manual that is being used universally by MTA bus operators. This type of survey will be ongoing as new routes are added and existing routes are changed to conform with service alterations. Each bus division and all street supervisors have a complete manual of all routes, and every bus operator has an abbreviated guide that includes all of the bus routes in his/her division.

The surveying of an entire bus system in a large metropolitan area is a mammoth undertaking and one that should be initiated after careful study. While this project was geared to ameliorate some of the problems that individuals who are blind or visually impaired fare in their attempts to navigate

the system, it was found that this activity will likely be of benefit to the general riding public. Numerous other groups will directly benefit from this endeavor, and the agency presents a more proactive stance in complying with the provisions of the ADA.

Numerous operations personnel in this agency have remarked that announcing transfer points and all intersections was formerly required by all bus operators. However, over a period of years, operators stopped making such announcement and the rule was no longer enforced by supervisors. When the ADA was passed and made this a universal requirement, most operators, many of whom were new and had never experienced this activity, were at a loss of how to proceed.

Additionally, approximately fifteen percent (15%) of all operators do not have regular routes or are part-time employees. This results in their being assigned different routes and different types of service (e.g., local, limited, express) on a daily basis. These factors make it extremely difficult for operators to be familiar with numerous lines and know all of the lines which intersect with them. The use of this manual has allowed them to make a smooth transition into announcing stops and to more easily move from one line to another.

A very difficult lesson which was learned by this activity has been that such an undertaking requires both time and a staff dedicated to this specific task. It is a grave mistake to enter into such a detailed and time-consuming activity while performing other tasks. Additionally, there should be close interaction with other departments throughout the entire process to assure that relevant data are collected. Care should be taken that all documents are presented in a consistent format and that they are easily updated and reprinted as necessary.

When it became obvious that this activity would require the assistance of additional personnel, an attempt was made to use several high school students to assist in the information gathering phase. While this provided them with an opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of how a public transportation agency functions, their contributions were actually marginal. They had to be carefully and closely supervised, and this required an investment of time and effort by the project staff which was already thinly stretched. The help of adult volunteers was sought, but again it was necessary to spend precious time in training and supervising them.

It is recommended that transit agencies which undertake a similar activity designate specific personnel to collect the data using previously agreed upon criteria. Care should be taken in the preparation of the final documents to insure that it is consistently formatted and edited- This has become such a valuable tool to the bus operations that it is recommended that all transit agencies consider producing a similar manual.

Goal 2 -- The major outcome of this activity has been an increased awareness by transit personnel of issues which passengers with disabilities face in their daily lives. Each session included a panel of persons with disabilities who related many of the issues that are faced by consumers using public transportation on a daily basis. These included such things as the technique of locating a light rail or bus stop for a blind person and a person's difficulty in trying to board a lift-equipped bus using a wheelchair during rush hour. Information that was reflective of the backgrounds of the participants was very helpful in addressing issues of comfort and misunderstandings of people with disabilities.

A very valuable lesson that was learned was that a heterogeneous composition of the participants in terms of their work assignments is quite

desirable. This is also reflective of the fact that most people truly do not live and work in and with homogenous settings. Rather, all systems and departments form a unified whole in which common ground is more often the rule than the exception. Additionally, having a panel of persons with a variety of disabilities provides opportunities to address issues that affect these various groups rather than single disability groups.

Goal 3 --The major outcome of this goal has been an increased use of both heavy and light rail modes of transportation by passengers who are blind or visually impaired. Because this activity began late in the project year, precise data cannot be quantified for several months to determine if there has been an increase in the use of the rail systems by this focus group.

A very valuable lesson learned from this activity is that orientation and mobility instructors must be experienced in working with adults and must provide their own liability insurance. Having an independent agency coordinate all activities between the instructors and the consumers negates possible liability risks for the transit agency. During the course of the training, some consumers express concern that their being trained on different modes could possibly have a negative effect on their ability to continue using the MTA's paratransit service. Having the independent agency serve as a buffer in this activity effectively eliminated this misconception; consumers were continuously assured that all information about them was handled confidentially.

Goal 4 -- It is important for the MTA to provide consistent information to consumers with disabilities in a format that they can use. The information was always available, but it had never been organized into one document and presented in accessible formats. When this item was field tested with individuals with disabilities, the response was completely positive and overwhelmingly in favor of wide distribution of this guide. Many consumers told of situations

where they had to piece together information from a variety of sources, have other persons read it to them, and make serious assumptions of certain policies which were difficult to find. An example of this is illustrated by the statement in the guide that children under the age of six (6) ride free with an adult who pays a full rather than a reduced fare. This policy has been verbally communicated to consumers for several years, but has not been presented in an accessible format (e.g., Braille, large print) for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

The primary lesson learned from this activity is that careful consideration should be given to the material which is included in such a guide. Detailed information on how to get from one point to another is not universally useful and consumes valuable space. One should also be cognizant of the fact that there will never be a definitive document which will fill the needs of all consumers with disabilities. Effort should be made to provide information and formats for people representing a wide variety of disability groups. It is absolutely essential that any agency or transit property which attempts to develop such a guide should have major input from persons with disabilities. Therefore, the same information is available to consumers with disabilities that is available to the general riding public.

It is recommended that all public transit agencies develop a similar guide and produce it in accessible formats. Generally, the most difficult task is determining what data to include and how it should be presented. Additionally, it should be updated periodically as information and the system changes so that individuals with disabilities will have access to the same information which is provided to the general riding public,

Goal 5 -- The MTA has continuously affirmed its commitment to providing safe, reliable transportation to the general public, including individuals with

disabilities. Providing the personnel and necessary transit vehicles to continue this type of activity is one way in which this commitment is demonstrated. The "A Lift to Freedom" staff maintains a presence in the community through these presentations and by their continued use of lift-equipped buses for their personal and professional transportation needs.

One major lesson learned from this activity has been that it is necessary to revisit sites every few months. Persons who are newly disabled or new to the area will benefit from these demonstrations. Additionally, those who have participated in the demonstrations in the past may not have changed their traveling habits; a second or third opportunity to participate in such an undertaking may well serve as the catalyst for change,

It is largely recommended that public transportation systems engage in similar outreach activities throughout their service areas. The benefits are both positive and long lasting in cementing a harmonious relationship between transit providers and their disability communities. Additionally, this proactive approach to providing services to consumers with disabilities represents an effective public relations tool throughout the service area as the vehicle is clearly marked with the "A Lift to Freedom" banner on the outside, which prominently displays the international accessibility symbol and the project's telephone number.

## **Evaluation**

### **Formal Evaluation Activities**

Two of the activities provided a tool for formal evaluation by consumers or participants. The reaction to the sensitivity training was achieved by having each of the participants complete an evaluation form (see Appendix), This

instrument was developed by Frank Pinter of MCIL, and has been used by him in numerous sensitivity training sessions.

A total of sixty-five (65) employees attended the sessions and their overall evaluation was that the training was very beneficial and would have an impact on how they will interact with individuals with disabilities in the future. Additional comments included a desire for follow-up training and a more structured environment. While two participants expressed a desire to have the sessions cater to the needs of a specific department, most persons stated that they found it advantageous to have had the configuration of employees represent a cross section of departments in the MTA.

**Chart 3 - Analysis of Sensitivity Training Evaluation by Participants**

| Question | RESPONSES |       |             |           |
|----------|-----------|-------|-------------|-----------|
|          | Yes       | No    | No Response |           |
| 1        | 88.88     | 11.11 |             |           |
| 2        | 95.31     | 3.12  |             |           |
| 3        | 96.88     | 1.56  | 1.56        |           |
| 4        | 100       |       |             |           |
| 5        | 100       |       |             |           |
|          | Fair      | Good  | Very Good   | Excellent |
| 6        |           | 20.63 | 50.79       | 28.57     |
|          |           |       |             |           |

According to their reports, prior to the sensitivity sessions, approximately eighty-eight percent (88%) of the participants were comfortable interacting on a personal basis with individuals with disabilities. Yet nearly eighty percent (79-37%) ranked the training sessions as either very good or excellent. This result validates the need for such training even though the participants reported

feeling at ease with individuals with disabilities. Their comments included them having enjoyed the chance to become involved in a dialogue with these individuals and to have many of their questions answered in a non-threatening and accepting environment, As a result, they reported dismissing firmly held myths and stereotypes concerning individuals with disabilities. Chart 3, above, represents an analysis of the responses provided by participants on the evaluation form.

The orientation and mobility training for individuals who are blind or visually impaired was conducted by licensed instructors each of whom have long years of professional experience in the field. Checklists for both the heavy and light rail systems were developed (see Appendix) for their use to measure the effectiveness of training and the consumer's accomplishment as a result of the training. A separate evaluation form was also developed which provides information on how the consumer's overall skills were enhanced. This latter form was signed by both the instructor and the consumer. A final evaluation tool was filled out by the consumer following training with the help of the "A Lift to Freedom" staff.

The vast majority of consumers received training on the light and heavy rail systems as they had not previously used these modes in their traveling. The instructors reported that their trainees told them that they had been hesitant to use the heavy rail system in the past because of their unfamiliarity with the layout of the stations and fear of standing on the platforms. However, following this training, they gained confidence and a willingness to continue using this mode of transportation in their daily travels.

## **Informal Evaluation Activities**

The disability transit guide was completed during the final phase of this

project and universal reaction to it has not yet been ascertained. However, it was presented in draft form to members of the Consumer Advisory Council for Accessible Transportation (CACAT), members from the National Federation of the Blind, the American Council of the Blind, and persons with disabilities who attended a community festival in mid-July 1993, Each person who examined it was thoroughly pleased by its format, content, and the fact that it will be available in accessible formats. This guide is dated but will be amended periodically to reflect changing information.

The STOP document which was developed throughout the entire project period will not be universally used until late August 1993 when the bus operators begin their Fall schedule, However, this document has been extensively reviewed by personnel in the following MTA departments: bus division superintendents, dispatchers, and operators; Operations and Scheduling Planning; Information Services; Media Services; Customer Relations; and Bus Supervision. Additionally, it has been favorably reviewed by members of the ADA Committee and the president of the local union that represents bus operators. Many of these people have made suggestions on the addition or exclusion of certain data, however, their overall reactions have been extremely supportive and positive. Over time this document will undergo many changes and revisions as the system is changed and augmented to reflect different service requirements. For example, as the document was in its final stages, three additional bus routes were added to provide feeder service to the light rail system. Judging the favorable reactions from MTA employees, it is anticipated that the bus operators will readily use this guide to enhance their announcement of this information,

The community-based demonstrations and presentations have continued to demonstrate the MTA's commitment to providing quality service to individuals with disabilities, The deliberate inclusion of additional disability groups to whom

these activities are geared provided an opportunity to spread the message regarding public transportation services for individuals with disabilities.

## Summary

The second phase of the "A Lift to Freedom" project included many activities which were specifically designed to provide enhanced services for consumers who are blind or visually impaired. However, individuals in various other disability groups will also benefit from the activities undertaken and the products generated. Such groups include people who speak other languages, individuals with cognitive impairments or learning disabilities, newcomers to the area and persons with limited reading skills. In fact, the general riding public will benefit directly and indirectly from most of these activities.

One of the project activities resulted in the production of a document designed to provide pertinent information to individuals with disabilities in a format that will be easy for most persons to use. This document pulls together information that has been available in fragmented form in various other MTA publications and which has always been available to the general public. The accessible formats include print, large print, Braille, audio tape, and computer diskette. The document is will be updated periodically.

One of the ADA regulations is that bus operators must announce transfer points and other points of interest on a regular basis. This same requirement has been extant in the MTA's formal rule book but has been very loosely enforced during the past several years. Therefore, a major activity was undertaken by this project to provide a tool for operators to use to help facilitate their performing this important function. This document, STOP Manual, is available to every bus operator, supervisor, dispatcher, and superintendent, as well as all administrative personnel in the Operations Division. It is designed to

be updated on an as-need basis as the service is changed, augmented, and adjusted to reflect current scheduling and bus routes,

The orientation and mobility training which was designed and provided to consumers who are blind or visually impaired was overwhelmingly successfully in terms of enhancing the travel options of individuals in this focus group. The training was on two specific modes and was only offered to adults who are experienced and independent travelers. The subcontractor for the project coordinated the entire operation and went to considerable lengths to insure the confidentiality of each consumer's identity and method of traveling. This was necessary in order to convince the consumers that their participation in training would not negatively reflect on their ability to use the MTA's paratransit services.

The employees who participated in the sensitivity training sessions represented sixteen (14) departments within the MTA. A good deal of interaction which they experienced with the panel of persons with disabilities gave them first-hand information about the concerns and issues consumers with disabilities in their attempts to navigate public transit systems.

The continuation and expansion of community-based outreach to the disability community provides needed continuity and a proactive statement of the MTA's commitment to serve its passengers with disabilities. As an increasing number of citizens becomes newly disabled and others reach adulthood and enter the labor force, it is quite important that the MTA continues to market its services to insure that the message reaches as many consumers and potential consumers as possible.

The development of this project was initially designed to be very singular in its focus. However, the deliverables produced and activities which were undertaken and completed have resulted in enhancing travel options by transit consumers from many disability groups to be able to confidently navigate the MTA system, In addition, MTA personnel have participated in the refinement of a

document which it is hoped will have long-lasting and meaningful impact on operators as they begin to routinely announce transfer points and other points of interest. Their input has not only been substantive, but also has served to sensitize them to the travel needs of individuals with disabilities.