

Measuring Transportation Characteristics of the Disabled: Louisville, Kentucky

GORDON SCOTT BONHAM, Ph.D.*
University of Louisville

ABSTRACT: *The transportation authority serving Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky purchased a set of lift-equipped buses to be placed in service in January 1988 and needed to know on which routes to place them. Soon afterward, they would need to make a decision whether to purchase additional lift-equipped buses. More generally, they wanted to know how best to plan for the needs of people with disabilities. A single general population survey that could provide all the information needed would have been too costly. An alternative method, using three stages of data collection, was selected: a survey of agencies and organizations serving people with disabilities, a canvass of people identified by these organizations, and telephone interviews with a subset of canvass respondents. This article reports on information collected through the canvass. Simultaneous to public media coverage of the study, canvass questionnaires were mailed to the members or clients of local organizations and agencies made up of or serving people with disabilities. A follow-up telephone interview was completed with a sample of those who did not return the canvass questionnaires. It was estimated that 5.5% of the Jefferson County, Kentucky population have disabilities, and that one-half of these people are under 65 years of age. As many as one-fourth of them may require lift access to use a public bus. The findings showed that most people with disabilities are driven by a relative or a friend when they need to travel; the second most common means of transportation for them is driving their own cars. Fixed-route bus users are younger than users of other types of transportation. They have fewer limitations overall, but are more likely to have communication or learning limitations than are disabled people driving their own cars. About half of the respondents had problems getting places; reaching places that provide health care was highest on the problem list. Although, half said they would use the bus if it were more easily accessible, current users were more likely to use the bus if it were better accessible in terms of schedule, route, or vehicle. Subsequent experiences of the transportation authority and other information suggest the canvass procedure produced reasonably reliable information.*

*Direct all correspondence to: Gordon Scott Bonham, Ph.D., University of Louisville, Urban Studies Center, Louisville, KY 40292.