



Executive Summary

Since 2013, ride-hail companies, also known as Transportation Network Companies or TNCs, have become an increasingly visible presence on San Francisco streets. However, for approximately 90,000 San Francisco residents with disabilities, as well as disabled commuters and visitors to our city, TNCs may not be an option some or all of the time. The experience of disabled riders depends on the commitment and ability of TNCs to provide services that meet a range of access and functional needs. Some individuals, including those who are blind or low vision, have reported increased mobility and independence with the advent of TNCs. Others, such as wheelchair users, have largely been unable to use the service and have experienced a corresponding decline in availability of on-demand accessible services they previously relied upon.

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) and the City of San Francisco believe in a

transportation system that serves everyone, and SFMTA has a longstanding commitment to providing accessible transportation options for older adults and people with disabilities. Since 1978, long before paratransit was required by the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the SFMTA has operated a paratransit program for people unable to use Muni, the City's public transportation system. SFMTA has also made long-term investments in the accessibility of the Muni fixed route system, the local taxi cab industry, and our local streets and sidewalks. Representatives from the disability community have guided the direction of these services for just as long, in well-established consumer councils, such as the San Francisco Paratransit Coordinating Council and the SFMTA Multimodal Accessibility Advisory Committee.

This report identifies the opportunities and barriers that TNCs present for people with disabilities in San Francisco, how their presence impacts equal access to

all modes of transportation in the City, and explores how peer transportation agencies in other cities are interacting with TNCs to try and improve access.

Impact of TNCs on the transportation network

SFMTA is responsible for managing the surface transportation network of San Francisco, although it does not have direct regulatory authority over TNCs. Emerging mobility services are changing the way people with disabilities move around the City, both directly and indirectly. For example, TNC operations exhibit several roadway conflicts that pose considerable safety risks for older adults and persons with disabilities, who are at higher risk of death from traffic-related injuries. TNCs also contribute to an increase in vehicle miles travelled. Greater vehicle miles traveled on San Francisco streets increase the risk of collisions with older adults and people with disabilities, and also contribute to congestion that slows down modes that people with disabilities rely on for independent travel through the City, including public transit, taxi service, and paratransit. Finally, San Francisco is among a number of markets that experienced a decline in taxi service, particularly in wheelchair accessible ramp taxis, since TNCs began operations. Despite this reduction in availability and shift in the general population towards using TNCs, people with disabilities are still more reliant on taxicabs than the general public.

TNC service opportunities and barriers

Transportation Network Companies have articulated visions and values that inherently include access for all. Uber's first core value is, "We do the right thing, period." and Lyft says they "see the future as community-driven – and it starts with you." In some ways, these two companies are living up to these ideals. For example, TNCs have provided an unprecedented level of access to on-demand transportation for people with visual disabilities; employment for deaf and hard of hearing individuals

as drivers; and more timely access to healthcare for some riders who do not require wheelchair accessible service.

On the other hand, many of the benefits that have attracted users to TNCs, such as quick response time, cheaper fares, and ease of payment, have not been afforded equally to all riders with disabilities. Pilots to introduce wheelchair accessible TNC service are sparse, and information on their progress is limited or unavailable; TNCs provide limited training and guidance to provide assistance to persons with a variety of disabilities; and healthcare transportation partnerships with TNCs do not appear to include any meaningful equivalent service for riders who require wheelchair accessible transportation.

Looking towards the future, efforts to adjust policy across the nation to address the changing landscape of transportation may provide models for how TNCs can successfully provide services that promote and provide disabled access. If successful, policy intervention would provide the opportunity for public-private partnerships, and provide clear accessibility standards to allow for collaboration in the public interest. Additionally, the imminent introduction of autonomous vehicles on TNC platforms, without a focus on physical accessibility and access to these vehicles, may mirror the largely inaccessible TNC reality of today.



Regulation and enforcement For TNCs to meet the SFMTA’s goals of equity, accessibility and affordability, they must be inclusive of all persons with disabilities. The SFMTA lacks direct regulatory oversight of TNCs, though, which has prevented the SFMTA from ensuring that those who require accessible vehicles, physical access points, services, and technologies receive the same or comparable level of access as persons without disabilities.

Since establishing oversight of TNCs in 2013, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has promulgated only a few regulations and minimal oversight to ensure equal access for passengers with disabilities. New legislation, effective January 1, 2019, known as Senate Bill 1376: The TNC Access for All Act (Hill), provides the CPUC with the mandate to improve access to TNC service for wheelchair users and others with disabilities, as well as the opportunity to work with stakeholders to build public trust and increase transparency.

Peer agency efforts to regulate or work with TNCs to improve access for persons with disabilities San Francisco is not the only large, urban city addressing accessibility of TNCs. A review of Boston, Chicago, and New York City found that peer cities are grappling with similar challenges and opportunities to improve access to TNCs for persons with disabilities.

- Accessible services have the best chance for success with a policy commitment to accessibility and a dedicated funding source. Many jurisdictions have required a surcharge to target funds for the provision of wheelchair accessible service.
- Riders with disabilities, like the general public, want to have choices. For example, bus service may work well for a disabled person’s trips to work and school, but they may want to use a taxi or TNC on an evening after a movie. Riders also





want to choose whether to pay less by sharing a ride or to spend more to go directly to their destination.

- Training drivers of wheelchair accessible vehicles is crucial to smooth and safe operations. Drivers need to be comfortable with the securement systems and tie-downs, as well as different types of mobility devices. Drivers should also be well versed on the common needs of persons with different types of disabilities. Finally, drivers must know that riders with disabilities are the experts on their needs.
- Without publicly available data, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of a partnership, incentive program, or regulation. Programs and regulators that have set benchmarks for accessible service have required TNCs to share data to confirm whether or not service standards and response time targets are being met.

Policy Options The report finds that improving disabled access to TNCs requires action across sectors.

Public Sector

Strengthen regulatory oversight of TNC

accessibility. The TNC Access for All Act, or Senate Bill 1376 (Hill), requires the California Public Utilities Commission to implement regulations that improve accessibility of TNCs. To achieve this, the CPUC should develop regulations that

1. Extend protections to people with disabilities equally in all areas of the state.
2. Require sufficient data and establish requirements that make transparent how TNCs use public funds to achieve established benchmarks for service standards and response time targets.
3. Establish protections that ensure all drivers are trained to proficiency on serving passengers with disabilities.
4. Provide consumers with a mechanism for providing input on TNC service performance.
5. Commit CPUC resources to staffing, programs, and enforcement focused on improving disabled access.

Leverage the expertise of local agencies and consumers to develop and enforce strengthened regulations.

To administer the regulations developed under the TNC Access for All Act, the CPUC should rely on locally-convened bodies with demonstrated expertise in providing, overseeing, or directing accessible transportation services. These entities will be best prepared to assist in establishing service standards and evaluating proposals for new services.

Private Sector

Improve the TNC user experience for all persons with disabilities. TNCs have clear opportunities to make changes to their business practices and service models. When making these changes, companies should prioritize riders who have traditionally not been served or have been underserved, particularly wheelchair users who require accessible vehicles. TNCs can achieve this by implementing changes to many aspects of their service, including the provision of accessible vehicles on their platforms, enhancing their consumer and driver-facing apps and scheduling/dispatching interfaces, and improving disabled representation in company decision-making processes.

Cross-Sector

Create opportunities for public, private, and non-profit entities to work together to improve access for riders with disabilities. There are a number of opportunities for collaboration and partnership that provides innovative solutions to a range of transportation gaps or barriers. Collaboration across sectors could improve training of drivers, dispatching of wheelchair accessible rides, and availability of service.



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