

CROSS DISABILITY TASKFORCE

*Recommendations to
Improve Accessibility*

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INTRODUCTION

In December of 2020, City of Boise staff received a policy brief recommending we convene a cross disability advisory task force to build on the work of the ADA Parking Committee and the ADA transition plan working group. The brief outlined the importance of elevating the full experience of a person with a disability living, working, and recreating in Boise beyond legal compliance with the ADA. In response to this brief, city staff built a taskforce comprised of six community leaders with various disabilities to bring forth recommendations to ensure Boise is truly welcoming and accessible for everyone.

TASKFORCE MEMBERS

Dana Gover

ADA Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator
& person with a physical disability

Jeremy Maxand

Executive Director, LINC & person with a physical
disability

Jen Grush-Dale

Executive Assistant, LINC & person who is a little
person

Steven Snow

Executive Director of CDHH & person who is deaf

Dianna Willis

Idaho Access Project President & person who is
blind

Carol Baron

ISDB Director of B/VI Outreach and ICBVI ATC
Program Manager (retired) & person with low
vision and hard of hearing



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

The Cross Disability Advisory Task Force has met weekly over the course of two months. In that time, they have worked together to develop eight key recommendations for the City of Boise. These recommendations are ranked in order of highest community impact.

1. Affordable and accessible taxi and ride share service is non-existent in Boise. Existing options for transportation for those with disabilities are incredibly time consuming: they must be arranged days in advance, operation on Saturdays is restricted with no services on Sundays, and high demand often renders services unavailable. As community members with disabilities, we want to use a taxi or rideshare just like anyone else. This taskforce recommends for the City of Boise to purchase three to five accessible vehicles to be conditionally gifted to Boise taxi companies who would like to partner. Our hope is that once demand for services is more widely understood, more taxi and ride share companies would purchase accessible vehicles on their own and place into service. We feel this is our top priority as this could improve the quality of life for so many.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the taxi industry saw a significant decline in service. As Boise is still relatively small, most remaining taxi companies are single driver owners and operators. As the pandemic continues, drivers struggle to find enough riders with their existing 4-7 passenger vehicles. They do not feel there is enough business in these current times to justify operating a 2-to-3-person accessible van as their only vehicle. In speaking with local accessible transport companies, they also feel there is not enough business need for after 5 pm services or on-demand services.

As the City of Boise does not have the authority to regulate ride share services or Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), this recommendation would require partnerships with transportation companies such as VRT. The city is continuing to explore potential options and partnerships in the valley. Current City Code does incentivize accessible taxi vehicles by allowing them to operate for 11 years (rather than seven (7) years) before the vehicle must be retired.

2. For all community members to have full access to their Neighborhood Association meetings, events, and gatherings, we recommend the City of Boise assist in streamlining resources for effective communication and provide funding to associations for accessibility. Funding would be used for ASL interpretation, materials in braille or large print, etc. We also recommend expanding the existing toolkit for Associations to include other accessibility best practices and information such as people first language, how to fulfill accommodations, how to host an inclusive event or meeting, etc. There is no exact need known for ASL and other accommodations community members need as so many do not request accommodations or go without. In an effort to better understand the amount of need, the city's Energize Program Manager could potentially pilot a small amount of funding to act as a central source of funds that all Neighborhood Associations can access. This can then be reevaluated in future funding allocations. This taskforce also recognizes the capacity limits of city staff in arranging all accommodations on behalf of Neighborhood Associations. Thus, we recommend the City source accommodations services that offer easy to use services. Additionally, should accommodation requests become frequent, we recommend training association staff on accommodation resources and have them arrange accommodations, while the city continues to provide funding.
3. As many of our recommendations stretch citywide and communitywide, we recommend formalizing this taskforce into a standing body of the City of Boise, titled "The Disability Commission." This Commission would assist in executing these recommendations and collaborate with and advise city staff on the impact of City of Boise policies, practices and ordinances to help ensure inclusion, equity, and access for people with disabilities in all aspects of City of Boise operations and community life. We would like to model this commission after the Historic Preservation Committee or Planning and Zoning Commission. This standing body would bring accessibility in a proactive manner as we could provide guidance and partner across city operations such as Parking services, Planning and Development Services, Parks and Recreation department, etc. to best ensure access for all. We recognize that disability and access can touch many programs, buildings, and services. Therefore, we recommend weaving this body into existing processes as well as creating new processes to include access as the city grows while being mindful of time constraints.

4. As our city grows, we are finding that those without disabilities are unaware of best practices and etiquette for sharing a pedestrian pathway with those with disabilities. As our downtown dining and entertainment becomes more popular, the accessibility of pedestrian pathways, such as sidewalks, is becoming increasingly difficult or impossible for us to navigate.

On trails, including the Greenbelt, we frequently encounter bicyclists and scooters passing at high speed and people who don't understand that people using a wheelchair, white cane, or guide dog may need to travel, at times, in the middle of the path due to uneven terrain. This taskforce recommends working with City staff to create education and awareness materials to distribute to the community and businesses. These materials would educate people without disabilities about the importance of barrier-free sidewalks, disability etiquette, and how things such as scooters, bikes, or patio chairs can negatively impact those with disabilities as we try to equally enjoy our downtown and shared pathways.

5. The city's PDS team is currently revising Boise's zoning code. For people with disabilities, revisions such as "Do Not Block" painting on the access aisle of accessible parking stalls, required clear width of sidewalks, and placement guidelines of bike racks are vital for maintaining equal access. This taskforce recommends reviewing zoning code revisions with city staff to ensure accessibility is included in design and development standards before codes are finalized. Our ask is to prioritize accessibility in new codes to bring consistency in design and streetscapes for all builds, remodels, and designs. We see too often accessibility as an afterthought and builders look to the city for guidance and regulations for enforcement. We would like to have codes ensure accessibility so enforcement and new builds can be streamlined and aligned for accessibility. City staff have coordinated working sessions with this taskforce to review and make recommendations to the zoning code revisions as part of the community engagement period of this project.
6. Our Ridge2Rivers trail system has twelve (12) trails that are considered more accessible as they have wider widths, minimal obstacles, and relatively flat grades. However, these trails are not fully accessible and therefore difficult or impossible to use for people with disabilities. Members of the community who used to hike frequently near Camels Back with their guide dogs, no longer hike as they feel unsafe with speeding bikes. Another member who utilizes a wheelchair, went for a hike on an accessible trail only to get stuck in sand shortly after embarking. When she tried embarking on a different trailhead, she feared parking as there was no access aisle to deploy her ramp which could have left her stuck waiting for the adjacent parked car to move.

For people with disabilities, a simple hike on R2R trails requires significant research beforehand to locate an accessible trail, determine if the trailhead has accessible parking and restrooms, ensure obstacles such as a closed gate are not present, make sure the trail is wide enough, has cell coverage for adaptive technology, determine their level of comfort with all user trails vs. pedestrian only, if the trail is near a route with accessible transportation, and adequate surface material for wheelchair use. A common misconception is that for trails to be accessible they need to be paved. This is not our ask nor goal. This taskforce recommends partnering with city staff and fellow organizations of Ridge2Rivers to make fully accessible trail and trailhead options so we may recreate equally. A significant barrier to trail accessibility is that the R2R website isn't fully accessible or intuitive to use. As research prior to hitting a trail is critical for an enjoyable experience, we recommend reworking the "Access" page of the R2R website to give more detail of the trail options, location of trails, placement of accessible parking, etc. for easier planning.

7. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance and value of our parks, recreation opportunities and community events sponsored by the City of Boise. However, for people with disabilities, it can be difficult and time consuming to find information on where to enjoy an accessible park or which trailhead would be most accessible for them. Therefore, this taskforce recommends the City of Boise create an accessible webpage to act as a hub for all things accessibility so community members and visitors can play, work, and recreate equally. This website could house information on accessible features at parks, accessibility resources in the Treasure Valley, clubs and organizations such as Deaf Grayhairs (a social club for deaf and hard of hearing community members), AdVenture programming, etc. to spread awareness of resources and build community.

- Awareness and education are important aspects of building a City for Everyone and a welcoming environment. Therefore, this taskforce recommends training for city staff. Members of this taskforce are connected to organizations such as, the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH) and the NW ADA Center-Idaho and could design specific trainings to further the city’s internal culture of inclusion. Trainings could include how to work with an interpreter, Emergency American Sign Language (ASL) for our emergency responders, disability etiquette, ADA regulations, a disability panel discussion to have meaningful discussions with staff regarding accessibility, etc.

THE DISABILITY COMMISSION

The Disability Commission would help the City of Boise build on its commitment to Creating a City for Everyone, and work towards a broader vision for access and equity. We recommend folding the work of the ADA Parking Committee into this new commission, which would be comprised mainly of people with various disabilities. It is important for this committee to have the majority of members be people with disabilities, as we can offer the most insight and perspective.

In addition to continuing work on our recommendations, this Commission would like to:

- Serve as an advisory body for internal initiatives, programs, and buildings so they are inclusive and accessible.
- Collaborate with the City of Boise and other partner entities on new developments, streetscapes, resigns, bike paths, and pedestrian pathways to ensure accessibility.
- Advise the Community Accessibility Manager on priorities, issues of concern, and help strategize innovative solutions.

We would like to acknowledge that our current membership is not fully representative of our community members with disabilities. Should this Commission be approved, it is our goal to actively recruit an additional member with an intellectual or developmental disability. We feel it is important to be intentional about our representation and have at least one member with intellectual or developmental disability as they are too often not included.

PURPOSE: The Disability Commission (DC) advises and assists the Mayor, City Council, and City departments to realize the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of economic, political, and community life in the City of Boise.

MISSION: To create an inclusive Boise by addressing access barriers, raising awareness, and bridging communities.

VISION: We envision a city that is accessible, inclusive, and equitable for people with disabilities.

Timeline of Recommendations

Short Term (0-6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning Code Rewrite & Access Prioritization • Standing up the Disability Commission • Community Accessibility Webpage
Mid-Term (6-1 year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian Pathway Etiquette • Neighborhood Association Interpretation & Accessibility Toolkit
Long Term (1-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Trainings • Trail Accessibility • Enhancing Accessible Transportation