

ACCESSIBLE FUTURES CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

A Listening Conference of over 450 People with Disabilities
and Friends of People with Disabilities
Bay Area Metro Center, San Francisco, 16-17 June 2025

WHEREAS,

The Accessible Futures Conference, a 'Listening Conference' convened at the Bay Area Metro Center in San Francisco on June 16-17, 2025, and sponsored by MTC-ABAG (Metropolitan Transportation Commission-Association of Bay Area Governments) brought together people from the nine-county Bay Area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma), people with multiple disabilities including orthopedic, sensory, cognitive, mental health, and environmental disabilities. Participant 'listeners' included elected and appointed government officials, community non-profit service provider, their managers and staff, and experts and advocates in relevant fields.

WHEREAS,

Stakeholders engaged deeply in sessions with our shared personal lived experience and quality of life, our needs, our values, and ideas for forward-looking strategies and best practices across areas such as housing, transportation, environment, employment and economic empowerment, and independent living.

WHEREAS,

This gathering reflects the collective expertise, commitment, and community leadership necessary to build an inclusive region where every individual can thrive. In one session after another, participants expressed the need for better communication with each other and stronger, more structured advocacy; and

WHEREAS,

This resolution reaffirms and aligns with global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the inclusion targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Age-Friendly City Framework, and the Cities for All Global Compact and Campaign, as well as our experience with and reliance upon the US federal law and policy, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and furthermore upon historic ground-breaking California state law including in the Unruh Civil Rights Act, State Building Code Title 11, and other state law, regulation, and guidelines.

WHEREAS,

This document and conference proceedings captures the collective discussion of a diverse and representative range of stakeholders around unmet needs, guiding principles, and actionable solutions;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,

That the participants of the Accessible Futures Conference affirm the following:

- The dignity of every person, and access and inclusion for all are human rights and non-negotiable. This is the world as it can be but has not yet become. Today we often are stigmatized, excluded from programs and facilities, or are simply ignored. Across transportation, housing, environmental access and safety, economic opportunity and beyond, people with disabilities continue to face systemic barriers.
- People with disabilities have the same right as others to live independently in community. This requires accessibility to and inclusion in public programs, policies and services, public rights of way, public places including parks and recreation, public accommodations, transportation, housing, education, economic opportunity and employment, and healthcare.

Communication and Education

To correct accessibility injustices, we shall improve communication and cooperation among ourselves and with others at regional and local levels in order to build a stronger advocacy network led by people with disabilities. This includes local government, the private sector, community-based nonprofits, individual advocates, and disabled and allied agency staff who share our vision and drive for access, equity, and inclusion.

We will work with others to educate communities throughout the Bay Area about the experience of people with disabilities in order to achieve support and momentum to bring about the changes we propose.

We recognize that funding sources to support these access initiatives will be critical for the long-term success of people with disabilities.

OWe will advocate for regional public agencies in the Bay Area, in collaboration with community stakeholders, to engage in disability strategic planning. This planning shall be rooted in the principles of disability justice in essential services including transportation, housing, environmental access and safety, and economy and employment. It shall also guide the finalization of a framework for the region to strengthen collaboration among elected officials, agencies, and people with disabilities in an effort to carry out more accessible policy and infrastructure that benefits all.

Transportation

We recognize that decades after ADAPT members protested inaccessible transportation by chaining themselves to buses, people with disabilities continue to face unnecessary barriers to transportation.

These include a costly and fiscally systemically unsustainable paratransit system that functions as an inherently unequal, "separate but equal" service, leaving disabled people at extreme risk during disasters; a fragmented wayfinding system with inconsistent payment machines and inaccessible signage; and direct threats to rider safety from poor bus design, vehicles leaving stops early, and a lack of compassionate customer service.

We affirm that all transportation systems in our region must:

- be interconnected across all 27 Bay Area transit agencies
- focus on providing equitable fares
- provide reliable and accessible wayfinding, and reliable notice during service disruptions and emergencies
- innovate funding models to ensure access across the region.

New transportation infrastructure shall be co-designed with the direct input of the disability community to address the full spectrum of riders. We identify a number of measures to address, including:

- reliable, low-maintenance elevators
- multi-sensory bus stop signals, and
- virtual and physical wayfinding for all riders
- new accessible public electrical outlets at transit hubs to support power wheelchairs, oxygen machines, and other life-sustaining equipment
- providing regional data on accessibility to foster transparency and a guide for hiring into key transit roles, ensuring decisions are rooted in lived experience.

We find that Bay Area transit is divided in two systems, separate and not equal: mass transit for most, and 'paratransit' for people with disabilities. Paratransit systems provide insufficient service, long wait times, lengthy advanced notice, unreliability in meeting appointments, and too many instances of poorly trained or supervised operators. Given information tracking, dispatch, and 'last mile' technologies newly available, paratransit must be completely modernized to assure service comparable to mass transit at comparable user cost. Current county line barriers must be eliminated.

Some intermediate opportunities might include: subsidizing paratransit fares, partnering with ride-share services, and giving riders the option to choose pick-up or drop-off times; requiring disability sensitivity training for all front-facing staff and prioritizing the hiring of people with disabilities; collecting and publicly sharing accessibility data across agencies to build trust and drive improvements; creating regular forums and listening to advocacy groups to ensure people with disabilities help shape transit decisions.

Housing

Accessible and affordable, safe, sanitary, and decent housing is essential to independent living in community. We recognize that people with disabilities continue to face deep and persistent barriers adequate housing. Barriers begin with outdated building codes that fail to mandate essential accessibility features such as roll-in showers, reinforced entryways, and visitable design, and extend to a widespread lack of in-home emergency alert systems that serve residents who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or have low vision.

Programmatic access within housing also remains fundamentally broken. Many people with disabilities report inaccessible application processes, including housing forms delivered only as images of paper documents, digital signature tools that do not comply with assistive technologies, and websites impossible to navigate with screen readers. These obstacles often prevent people from even entering the housing search process. They become invisible to the system, unable to secure a home.

We affirm that housing is a basic human right, one that includes both physical and programmatic accessibility which may include reasonable modifications. Every person deserves the opportunity to live in a mold-free, safe, and dignified environment. To that end, we resolve to expand efforts to retrofit and modify existing housing units to meet the diverse needs of people with disabilities. We further affirm that all new housing construction must be held to meaningful accessibility standards. Existing standards describe a minimum of level accessibility, not an aspiration to be approximated. New must be robust enough to accommodate changes in disability, such as the wide use of large, heavier, power wheelchairs barely considered in first-generation regulations.

We resolve to encourage local planners to more fully utilize planning code that better permit accessory dwelling units (ADUs). These often have ground-level access, and are more affordable because of small size, land re-use, and readily available utilities. Local planning departments and elected officials can also more effectively finance and integrate disability-aware policies and strategies into housing elements and broader development plans.

We resolve to work with real estate professionals and their organizations to properly identify and market ADA-compliant features to better connect available housing with those who need it. Studies show that many accessible units are not efficiently matched to households whom they would most benefit.

We resolve that housing application portals and digital systems must be fully accessible and ADA-compliant and clearly identify all accessibility features and barriers in all listings. State and local housing finance programs including the Qualified Allocation Plan must be revised to remove disincentives for architecturally and programmatically accessible housing developments. They must pay particular attention to the housing needs of people utilizing home and community-based services (HCBS) including In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS). Tenant protections including emergency financial and rental assistance must also be strengthened and expanded across all Bay Area counties. In particular, additional jurisdictions must adopt protections similar to those already in place in Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco eviction prevention of low-income seniors and disabled residents with little capacity to weather a financial emergency.

We commit to sustaining this work beyond policy proposals. We will advocate for accessibility standards that address the full range of needs, including multi-sensory alert systems, emergency egress, and other life-safety features that go beyond ambulatory access. We will build broad coalitions that bring together disability advocates, benefits of universal design. We will push for the creation of a program for homeowners with a single point of contact to assess accessibility needs, identify funding opportunities, and oversee the design and construction of modifications. Alongside this, we will work with tenant unions and advocacy organizations to demand improved programmatic access across all public housing authorities.

To build lasting relationships with decision-makers, we will follow up after meetings with concise summaries of our asks and offer ourselves as accessible, ongoing partners in implementation. Finally, we

call for the establishment of ADA coordinator positions in every major housing authority to manage accommodation requests and ensure full compliance with accessibility standards.

This resolution is a call to action and a promise to remain engaged until housing is no longer a barrier to inclusion, independence, or dignity for people with disabilities.

Environmental Access and Safety

Conference participants discussed at length the unmet needs of the disability community in often ignored areas of environmental and climate planning, such as:

- persistent lack of access to parks, recreation, and trails;
- regular maintenance for existing accessible features, including signage and wayfinding;
- failure to provide accessible, enclosed dog parks for service animal training and family recreation;
- lack of charging infrastructure for wheelchairs and mobility devices in public parks and green spaces;
- lack of preparation for the extreme danger posed by climate impacts like flooding and heatwaves, which disproportionately threaten people with disabilities; and
- lack of accessible post-disaster temporary and replacement housing.

We affirm that all environmental policies and programs a recurring commitment, not "one and done." Environmental inclusion requires that the initial investment in accessibility is protected by dedicated, ongoing maintenance. Community input is continuous, guided by the principle that we must break down institutional silos. We will build new relationship where the disability community is not just invited but empowered to lead.

Climate resilience planning must center the compounded risks faced by historically marginalized communities. Effective interventions will mandate that all climate action plans and disaster risk reduction strategies explicitly and meaningfully integrate disability inclusion from the ground up. Transportation providers, including current paratransit providers, will need to upgrade dispatch systems to accept GPS coordinates, enabling service to trail heads, parks, and other locations that do not have a traditional street address.

To sustain communications and continued conversations, we will establish processes for the disability community to review and provide feedback on the design of new parks and public facilities before they are built. Transparent systems require community feedback confirming receipt of a complaint or suggested improvement and reports back on its resolution. Only then can we build trust and encourage sustained engagement.

Economic Opportunity

We recognize that people with disabilities face multiple barriers to employment, including insufficient access to education and training, transportation barriers, physical and program barriers in the workplace, stigma, and inadequate healthcare and leave policies that could sustain full employment.

More specifically, we discussed:

- Ongoing cuts to Medicaid
- Threatened reductions in minimum survival levels of federal Social Security or Medicare
- Loss of Medicaid as earnings rise
- Shortages of reliable in-home care
- Discriminatory pay and unequal wages for equal work
- Stigma and misinformation in hiring (for example, assumptions that accommodations are cost-prohibitive)
- Inaccessible physical and digital environments that lock us out of jobs and services
- Limited access to startup capital and financial literacy resources
- Exclusion from procurement and contracting opportunities
- Lack of structured mentorship or career-guidance networks
- Inaccurate blanket job specifications (for instance, requiring a drivers license or the ability to lift 50 pounds when not essential to work to be performed), and
- Insufficient training of recruiters and human resources teams to handle accommodation requests without bias.

We affirm that true economic empowerment arises from recognizing our disability community as a vital resource and market and a wellspring of innovation, and by honoring entrepreneurship and self-employment as powerful paths to self-determination and upward social mobility. Workplaces and digital work environments designed for universal access facilitate our effectiveness as workers. We aim to eliminate discriminatory pay and hiring practices and actively counter the stigma surrounding accommodation costs. There must be no permission in the market for job placement that feels forced or limited by employer misperceptions about our ability to work in their spaces. We seek and deserve jobs that fulfill us, match our skill sets, grow our expertise, and ignite passion and creativity, and our contribution to the larger society.

We identify priority actions including:

- calling on policymakers to enact benefits reform so no one loses essential life-sustaining support like paid income through Social Security or medical benefits from Medicaid when an individual earns more or accepts new employment. Actions also include
- addressing the in-home care crisis by attaining an attractive living wage for care providers and funding reliable backup systems to sustain workforce participation; expanding access to capital for entrepreneurs with disabilities through targeted microloan and startup-funding programs paired with robust financial literacy training;
- removing unnecessary job requirements;
- piloting guaranteed-probation hiring windows that let candidates demonstrate skills before permanent placement;
- training recruiters and human resources professionals to serve as accommodation advocates and guide accessible hiring processes; and

- ensuring that employment readiness programs, skills development training centers, vocational rehabilitation programs, and intern and apprenticeship programs are disability-inclusive and support accommodations.

We resolve to build and sustain peer-led community networks offering ongoing mentorship, technical assistance, and collective advocacy; expand innovative hiring pathways; standardize accommodation-request questions in job applications; establish clear contact protocols so candidates receive timely responses; require disability inclusion as a compulsory element in procurement systems and corporate diversity definitions; and engage with chambers of commerce, regional and local economic development agencies, as well as innovation hubs across the Bay Area to ensure a pipeline of talent continues to benefit equally from the wider economic prosperity of the region.

Let this resolution be our charge to transform barriers into breakthroughs, ensuring that economic empowerment for people with disabilities, the central promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 190, becomes not just a promise, but the foundation of a more innovative, inclusive, and financially free future for us all.

THEREFORE,

Be it resolved that:

We adopt this Resolution as the sense of the Accessible Futures Conference of 2025, representing our discussions, deliberations, and demands based on our expertise, our lived experiences, and our inalienable human rights.

Be it resolved that:

This resolution will be hosted in a publicly accessible online platform and intended as a reference for advocates, policymakers, service providers, and community members as we plan, advocate, and implement accessibility improvements; and

Be it resolved that:

We, the participants of the Accessible Futures Conference, shall work together, as people of equal human rights and dignity, partnering with our local, regional, and state governments, and alongside community agencies, to reassert our place in Bay Area communities, to secure policies, essential services, and funding that enable all individuals with disabilities to live independently, fully included in our San Francisco Bay Area communities and beyond. We shall sustain communications and continued conversation, we will build a unified advocacy network using shared contacts from this space and among other supporters;

This resolution is not a one-time proposal or solution. It is a set of principles and goals to return to in the future and to help monitor progress towards full access and inclusion of people with disabilities.

And, be it resolved that:

We shall form a preliminary steering committee in July, 2025, to investigate the foundation of a new nine-county disability advocacy association, which can support these local disability rights and policy efforts throughout the Bay Area.

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